IMMERSED IN WATER CONFLICT: HUMOR AND PROCESS LITERACY AS RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN INTERNAL COALITION MAINTENANCE

by

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Water is a site of resistance. In late modernity, water wars have become increasingly prevalent across the globe. The locus for this case study of rhetorical strategies in internal coalition communication is an environmental campaign to prevent a proposed water project in the US West that threatens the sustainability of numerous watersheds in the region. The researcher examines internal coalition communication to develop knowledge about the rhetorical strategies for negotiating discursive difference and cultural tensions among participants. These strategies are important to coalition maintenance, which supports coalition health, durability and the capacity to effect change within social systems. Given climate change and sustainability issues in late modernity, the rhetorical strategies of coalitions that are organized to mitigate related problems are important.

The author constructs a theoretical framework with democratic, conflict and rhetorical theory to conceptualize internal coalition rhetoric because participation, conflict, persuasion, and deliberation are fundamental aspects of coalition maintenance. Rhetorical criticism and qualitative field methods are used as a mixed methodological approach to develop understanding about internal coalition rhetoric. To collect live rhetorics, the author does participant observation of coalition strategy meetings spanning several years and semistructured interviews with active coalition participants. Through analysis of field notes and interviews the author discovers the comic frame as a master frame for internal coalition maintenance because it promotes unifying yet critical ways to

address internal difference. Within a comic frame, process literacy (which pivots communication toward a collaborative communicative genre) and four types of humor are identified as rhetorical strategies for negotiating discursive and cultural difference. Additionally, findings indicate that humor at the expense of others can operate within both comic and melodramatic frames in particular *kairotic* moments without disrupting the master comic frame.

The author encourages more research on: (1) rhetorical strategies of both internal and external coalition communication as a means for developing social movement and deliberative democracy theory (particularly where water is a site of resistance); (2) the interplay between comic and melodramatic frames in both internal and external coalition communication contexts; and (3) identity vulnerability within a comic frame.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The path to the point in time where I can share my findings from this research spans decades. It was bumpy, exciting, challenging, frustrating, and at times daunting. Looking back over the years that led to my decision to go to graduate school and ultimately my selection of this dissertation topic, I think about a handful of mentors that shaped my interests in participatory communication processes within the context of environmental disputes during my work as Senior Coordinator with the Coalition for Utah's Future in the 1990s. Susan Carpenter taught me about the power of participant-driven dispute resolution processes. Cherie Shanteau and Clay Parr heightened my aspirations by encouraging me to consider law school. Scott Matheson, the former Governor of Utah, showed me the power in a power-to leadership style, and Steve Holbrook taught me, in a very practical way, how the medium is the message.

My decision to go to graduate school with an emphasis in conflict studies was also influenced by some of my experiences as a program manager and community mediator with Utah Dispute Resolution. Diane Hamilton created opportunities to mediate through a court affiliated mediation program and supported my interests in formally studying conflict theory. Rick Reese saw value in participatory communication processes at a community-based level and provided opportunities for me to both implement and share these ideas at community and neighborhood levels. The George and Delores Doré Eccles Foundation also supported efforts to problem solve at community and regional

levels and provided invaluable funding for work that I was honored to do in various locations and contexts.

Third-party work is extremely challenging and it requires a great deal of self-reflexivity. I have both failure and Leonard Hawes to thank for understanding the value of self-reflexivity and meta-communication during conflict. I once received funding, but failed to implement a peer mediation program at a local elementary school in Salt Lake City. Through dialogue with Len, I came to the realization that teaching kids to mediate their own disputes can be threatening in at least a couple of ways. Administrators, staff, and parents who identify with the role of adjudicator when disputes among children arise in schools may feel threatened by the principles of peer mediation. Moreover, the idea that a peer-mediation program could be a good thing to have at a school can be misconstrued as an implication that there is a particular problem with conflict at that school. Of course all schools are comprised of human beings who have conflicts, but not everyone views conflict as a sign that there is something important at stake, or as an opportunity. In short, I wish to emphasize that failing to implement the peer-mediation program weighed heavily in my decision to get a masters degree in conflict studies, which did not disappoint.

Graduate school (aside from parenting) was the most challenging endeavor I have ever undertaken. In the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, I encountered a vibrant intellectual community that challenged my thinking and capabilities every step of the way. There are too many individuals to name, but I want to acknowledge the profound impact that Jim Anderson, Karen Ashcraft, and Ann Darling had on me, particularly with regard to pedagogy early in my graduate studies. Each of

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I have always had a keen interest in environmental concerns, and one of the first courses I took in graduate school was in environmental conflict from Tarla Rai Peterson. In Tarla's seminar, I was introduced to collaborative learning and communication theory that connected with my passion for environmental issues. As the chair of my master's committee, Tarla opened doors for me. She supported me through independent studies, applied learning opportunities and in my decision to do collaborative community-based research. To this day, Tarla remains an inspiration to me and her scholarship continues to influence mine.

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CHAPTER 1

INTERNAL COALITION COMMUNICATION: SITUATING THE RESEARCH

Despite improved knowledge about the interdependence of healthy ecosystems in late modernity, environmental crises abound. The globalization of oil-based economies in the latter half of the twentieth century has resulted in erosion and desertification of land, significant degradation of ecosystems in which life forms are embedded, and exponential increases in the carbon dioxide (CO2) levels of the earth's atmosphere. The majority of scientists from a broad range of disciplines theorize that increased anthropogenic CO2 levels in the earth's atmosphere are causing global warming and climate change (Le Treut et al., 2007); glaciers are melting and the oceans are rising. Increased (polluted) surface water runoff from agricultural, industrial, and developmental activities, augmented by ground water extraction from finite ancient aquifers (or ground water mining, Loáiciga, 2008) is contributing to this rise in ocean levels. This influx of "fresh" water into the oceans, coupled with the increased CO2 levels at the ocean's surface, is resulting in ocean acidification and the decomposition of coral reefs, where some of earth's most diverse life forms dwell. These phenomena (among other anthropogenic causes) are disrupting food chains in the oceans where half of the oxygen in the earth's atmosphere is produced by plankton (Lozano, 2011). In summary, we can no longer take

for granted abundant supplies of fresh water and oxygen, both of which are vital to life on earth.

Scope and Justification

My professional experiences over the past twenty years, and my academic background in the biological sciences and communication, underlie my interests in mitigating environmental degradation processes, especially unsustainable practices. Some of the most critical issues we face in the context of climate change relate to water, watersheds, the water cycle, and the availability of potable water for living entities on the planet. On a general level, I am concerned with creating knowledge that promotes the possibility of sustainable water futures. More specifically, my research focuses on the rhetorical dynamics of coalition maintenance in the case of a water conflict in the American West.

Water is a site of resistance and coalitions organized to influence water policy are significant research loci because they help to create possibilities for sustainable water futures (Cox, 2010). Just as it is important to understand the rhetorical strategies of environmental social movements (e.g., DeLuca, 1999; Endres, Sprain & Peterson, 2009; Kinsella et al., 2008; Pezzullo, 2003, 2007), it is important to understand the rhetorical strategies of environmental coalitions. Butterfoss, Goodman, and Wandersman (1993) review coalition literature pertaining to health prevention and community capacity-building. These scholars discuss the need to develop the research base for coalition effectiveness because coalitions hold the potential to intervene and strengthen "the social fabric" for combating "chronic health conditions" (p. 315). Diverse actors with disparate values and broad associations constitute coalitions. Through outreach to diverse

associations, coalitions hold the potential for influencing and mobilizing broad constituencies. Coalitions form around issues and common goals to effect change. That which enables coalitions to be efficacious and durable, e.g., coalition maintenance, then bolsters the potential to effect change (Butterfoss et al., 1993). Therefore, understanding the rhetorical strategies of environmental coalition maintenance is part and parcel to understanding how to strengthen the capacity for combating chronic environmental degradation[1] (e.g., Cox, 2010).

Humans have been waging water wars across the globe over the past several decades (e.g., Shiva, 2002). In the 1990s trans-national corporations set their sights on making profits through water privatization initiatives on multiple continents (e.g., Smith, 2004; Trawick, 2003; Yeboah, 2006). Water privatization ignited social uprisings, and in the case of Bolivia, it resulted in the ouster of the country's president (Spronk & Webber, 2007). In response to this social upheaval over water, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution in July 2010 that recognizes access to clean water and sanitation as a human right. In the U.S. West, there are many on-going water conflicts over proposed interbasin water transfers from point sources to demand locations (typically from north to south, but sometimes both east and west). This is often from cooler and wetter climates to hotter and more arid climates, and toward large-scale energy and agrarian operations that require large volumes of water, or toward urbanized areas where the demand for and consumption of water is on the rise. One such water dispute is taking place in the desert Southwest over a proposed major interbasin aqueduct to convey water to a metropolitan area. This dispute primarily involves two states: Desert and Mountain.[2] There are a host of actors, but two of the most significant disputants are (1) a public entity known as the Urban Water District (UWD) that is seeking to augment

sources of water for the metropolitan area, and (2) a coalition known as the Rural Water Defenders (RWD)[3] that formed to block UWD's quest for water from adjacent and peripheral rural basins. The RWD served as the primary site for my research with the following overarching theoretical question: In environmental controversies, what rhetorical tactics and strategies enable or constrain coalition maintenance as participants negotiate cultural tensions and discursive difference within coalitions?

There are bodies of literature that treat coalitions originating from a variety of disciplines and subdisciplines including: organizational communication and development; health, risk and strategic communication; new media; computer science; game theory; political science; management; and negotiation. However, little has been written about rhetorical strategies for engaging difference (or negotiating conflict) in the context of internal coalition communication.

This case study focuses a lens on rhetorical strategies that enable and constrain internal coalition maintenance because attending to coalition maintenance is crucial to coalition efficacy (Butterfoss et al., 1993). Along this line of thinking and in order to address my overarching theoretical question, I narrowed my inquiry to two more specific research questions:

RQ1: What are the rhetorical tactics and strategies that respond to cultural tensions and discursive differences within coalitions and do they enable or constrain the ability to negotiate these differences?

RQ2: What are the rhetorical tactics and strategies of (dis)engagement and (non)participation in *maintaining* coalitions, especially those used for internal coalition audiences?

As I will present in future chapters, my study of the RWD reveals a set of best practices for coalition maintenance. Specifically, I will identify humor and process literacy as two key strategies of coalition maintenance across discursive and cultural difference.

Rhetorical theory fosters an understanding that audience reception and interpretation of messages will vary by individual and context. When actors (or rhetors) speak, the strategies used to sway an audience (rhetorical strategies) matter because they may enable *or* constrain desired outcomes. This research project focuses on the inherent challenges associated with coalition communication in the context of this major environmental conflict in the western United States. More specifically, it examines rhetorical tactics and strategies for negotiating internal coalition tensions associated with a major water controversy.

As a former third-party senior coordinator in a multiyear, statewide environmental dispute resolution project in Utah and as an environmental communication scholar, I have come to understand that communicative problems often arise around (but certainly are not limited to) *cultural tensions* and *discursive differences* among participants within coalitions formed to advance a set of environmental goals (or environmental coalitions). Cultural tensions and discursive differences can function as a site where environmental coalitions begin to unravel and suffer reduced efficacy in *coalition maintenance* and *development*. This dissertation builds from these understandings, but focuses a lens on rhetorical strategies pertinent to coalition maintenance. I initially set out to research whether cultural tensions and discursive differences (defined below) were salient or not in the case of RWD and, if so, to explore the rhetorical dynamics involved in these aspects of internal coalition communication. This approach to internal coalition communication research proved fruitful because they were salient and RWD as a case

study offers insights into best practices for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences within what Kenneth Burke (1959) has termed the comic frame. I will return to the comic frame later.

In summary, I offer two lines of argument: (1) we need to study specific rhetorical tactics and strategies in coalition maintenance; and (2) environmental coalitions require our attention because of the need to develop sustainable environmental - particularly water - policies. This dissertation specifically contributes to knowledge about communication within environmental coalitions with a focus on specific rhetorical strategies in coalition maintenance.

Definitions

Coalition

My working definition for the term "coalition" is a loosely held network of diverse actors, with disparate backgrounds and cultural traditions, joined together to share information to advance a common purpose or cause. I emphasize cultural diversity, which is a departure from other literature, because it is a site where conflicts are apt to arise. As I have come to understand, the vitality of a coalition is related to the manner in which conflicts are negotiated. In a review of definitions of coalitions, community health scholars Butterfoss et al. (1993) discuss points of divergence and convergence among a group of authors "who have developed distinguishing characteristics of coalitions" (p.316). While points of divergence include differences over requirements to formalize "leadership, structure, rules, and roles of members," Butterfoss et al. assert that a group of authors all overlap in their conceptualizations that

> coalitions should be issue oriented, structured, focused to act on specific

> goals external to the coalition, and committed to recruit member organizations with diverse talents and resources. They view coalitions as *'action sets' or aggregates of interested groups and individuals with a common purpose whose concerted actions are directed at achieving the coalition's goals.* That coalition members collaborate not only on behalf of the organization they represent, but also advocate on behalf of the coalition itself, is a defining characteristic of coalitions in comparison with other types of groups (*italics mine,* p. 316).

The RWD aligns closely with this meta-analysis of coalitions, but my working definition emphasizes participant heterogeneity along cultural lines within the aggregate.

Distinguishing Alliances from Coalitions

The terms "coalition" and "alliance" are close cousins, but I distinguish them by the degree of diversity with which they are comprised. Alliances, in contrast to coalitions, are a more predictable collection of individuals and organizations that are banded together because they have a natural affinity to work together on a range of related issues. For example, conservationists and environmentalists are historic allies (albeit with tensions) in the U.S. West, because conservationists want to conserve resources, and environmentalists strive to preserve certain resources. Roberts (2004) places coalitions on the loosest end of a collaboration-structure scale, which locates alliances/partnerships in the middle, and joint ventures or consortiums on the tightest end. While my definition of the distinction between coalitions and alliances emphasizes heterogeneity of participants and Roberts definition focuses on degrees of structure for collaboration, both of us view coalitions as loosely held structures that require collaboration.

Coalition Maintenance

Butterfoss et al. (1993) explain that coalitions often form in response to a threat or an opportunity and they trace the literature that delineates the importance of coalitions such as their ability to amass public support for an issue. These scholars also emphasize the need for coalitions to "be maintained and to remain durable." They argue, "If coalitions are to be an effective intervention, they will have to endure and have an effect on large sectors of the population" (p.317). This concern about endurance is at the crux of my research interest regarding how rhetorical strategies relate to coalition maintenance. As Roberts (2004) points out, after 20 years of practical experience in the non-profit world, maintenance and durability in trans-organizational systems, such as coalitions, can be understood through a "tri-process model: trust-building or people processes, governance or power processes, and coordination or management processes" (p.76). The main point here is that these tripartite dimensions of internal coalition maintenance and durability all involve communication, particularly participatory communication processes (see Johnson, Hayden, Thomas & Groce-Martin, 2009).

Coalitions are comprised of participants or actors, some who may identify as members and some who may not. Regardless, participants are actors who participate in coalition activities (i.e., attend meetings, read and write coalition materials, develop and maintain coalition web sites, plan fundraisers, share ideas and information, and implement action steps). Ideally, participants employ means toward coalition ends as defined by the coalition's mission. Coalitions are maintained through such *activities*. For example, a conference call among participants to discuss a pressing issue is a coalition maintenance activity. It enables communication among participants and offers an opportunity for them to engage with one another about an important issue across

geographic distances. When activities are routine and recur, such as monthly conference calls, these activities are coalition *practices*.

Through coalition activities and practices participants can either gain or lose a sense of belonging and passion for the coalition's mission. Individuals can be motivated to continue sharing their ideas, energy and time or, in contrast, their interests in participating in coalition functions might attenuate. Thus, by coalition *maintenance*, I mean all of the individual and collective messages, rhetorical tactics and strategies, activities and practices that coalition actors enact, which result in *a sense of ownership and belonging* in the coalition and which provide the *motivation to continue engaging* in future coalition work. These communicative activities and practices primarily entail internal coalition communication, and the negotiation of discursive differences and cultural tensions are challenging aspects of these communicative processes.

Cultural Tensions

Before defining cultural tensions, it is important to define culture. With the term culture, I am not exclusively referencing ethnically derived groups. My definition is broader than this; it extends to different ways of being and doing (daily activities) that emerge in social worlds. Drawing from Philipsen's (1997) speech codes theory, culture is "a code- […] a system of such code elements as symbols, meanings, premises, and rules" (p. 125). In other words, speech codes are ways of communicating that provide windows into culture. We might think of being rural or urban as a culture. For example, when I was working in Emery County, Utah, I quickly learned that my business attire and my relatively rapid speech patterns were but a few of the signs and symbols that marked me as 'other,' or someone from urban culture.

As in the above example, cultural tensions are often expressed and negotiated through communication, both verbally and nonverbally (e.g., Carbaugh, 1999; Conquergood, 1992, 2001; Peterson & Horton, 1995). Symbolic meanings, manners of speaking, or behaviors can create communicative ruptures among interlocutors. When these ruptures entail the violation of cultural rules, the upending of premises, or the symbolic conveyance of bizarre meanings, they get marked or noticed by interlocutors. Such moments entail cultural tensions, which can lead to overt or tacit conflict depending on how the tension is treated or negotiated (if at all). For example, different youth gangs may have cultural tensions over manners of dressing and speaking, as well as rules over taboo terms, and assumptions about what membership entails. While each could be classified in one group (i.e., gangs) their cultural differences may create friction when they interact. In the case of the RWD, some of the cultural tensions I have observed or have been informed about include: rural/urban, indigenous/non-indigenous, individualistic/collectivistic, and mainstream/alternative.

Discursive Difference

I am defining discursive difference in two ways. The first meaning entails discourse as a written or oral exchange of organized ideas, a conversation or a discussion. When individuals converse about particular topic of import, differences of opinion may arise and a conflict over these differences may emerge. On such occasions, it could be said that discursive differences exist.

A second meaning for discursive difference is more complex as it refers to Foucault's (1972, 1994) notion of discourse, where power and knowledge are joined. For Foucault (1972) discourse is "constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as

they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence." Modality, he defines as that which "allows [the statement] to be in relation with a domain of objects, to prescribe a definite position to any possible subject, to be situated among other verbal performances, and to be endowed with a repeatable materiality" (p.107). Moreover, Foucault explains how discourses function to influence social worlds:

> Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*. (p. 38)

In other words, Foucault defines a discursive formation as a series of discourses, broadly dispersed across societal sectors, that interconnect with regularities in orientation toward particular objects, concepts and choices. Some of these discourses become dominant through processes of institutionalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Dominant discourses produce alternative discourses that resist the underlying assumptions of dominant discourses. For example, take the discursive formation (or institution) of marriage. It is constituted by a constellation of dominant and non-dominant discourses. The dominant discourse of marriage in the United States assumes a heterosexual union, whereas various alternative discourses of marriage resist this notion and define marriage more broadly to include homosexual, transgendered, and heterosexual unions.

Discourses have material consequences. For example, "That's women's work," and "Who's wearing the pants in this family?" are examples of adages from the early and mid-20th century that connect with the discursive formation of patriarchy that props up realities of comparatively lower pay for women in the workplace. Such adages also carry

with them assumptions that women should provide most of the labor in the private domestic sphere. The majority of individuals do not question dominant discourses in a given social context, because they reflect social realities. However, when individuals critically examine the underlying assumptions, or question dominant discourses and have conflicting orientations toward them, as readily can be the case in a coalition comprised of unlikely allies, conflicts do arise.

When I focus on the rhetorical dynamics associated with negotiating discursive difference within coalitions, I may be referencing a simple conflict over differences in opinions or strategies on a given topic, or I may be treating the collision of dominant (or hegemonic) and alternative (counter-hegemonic) discourses within a given discursive formation as I have attempted to describe above. One such discursive difference in the RWD involves the (tacit) collision of rural and urban discourses among participants that identify with typically disparate orientations like ranchers and environmentalists. When cultural tensions or discursive differences arise in discourse, interlocutors respond in (un)intentional ways that affect what Wood (2008) calls a "communication climate," or "the emotional tone of a relationship between [or among] people" (p. 138). Sometimes responses shift perspectives.

Rhetorical Tactics and Strategies

Rhetoric is persuasive discourse intended to influence audiences. I am interested in examining both rhetorical tactics and rhetorical strategies. When I use the term rhetorical tactics, I am referring to the instances or isolated persuasive efforts in rhetorical situations that may or may not combine to form an observable pattern or rhetorical

strategy. For example, in the game of chess, each individual move is considered a tactic, which, when repeated might form a pattern or a strategy for winning the game.

Rhetorical strategies are patterned persuasive appeals used to influence audiences. They may have benign, exacerbating, or ameliorating effects on communication climate. In other words, rhetorical strategies can sway and repel audiences intentionally or otherwise. While this definition may sound a bit like discourses, rhetorical strategies are more narrowly defined. By this I mean that discourses circulate more broadly and create everyday realities in ways that go unquestioned in societies. Rhetorical strategies, in contrast, are patterns of persuasive speech used in specific socio-historic contexts that may aim to alter certain discourses in the broader social milieu. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) offer a definition of rhetorical strategies that help me to think about rhetorical strategies of coalitions because they focus on the link between rhetoric and institutional change, which coalitions often aspire to achieve. They define rhetorical strategies as "persuasive language" or "a significant tool by which shifts in a dominant logic can be achieved" (p. 41). Further, they define rhetorical strategies as "deliberate use of persuasive language to legitimate or resist an innovation by constructing congruence or incongruence among attributes of the innovation, dominant institutional logics, and broader templates of institutional change" (p.41). This definition touches on the important link between rhetoric and discourses as defined by Foucault. In sum, rhetorical strategies are observable communicative patterns that function to persuade audiences. Moreover, rhetorical strategies might draw on, assume, or legitimate dominant discourses and broader discursive formations in the social milieu, or they might seek to alter, silence, ignore or resist hegemonic discourses.

In this case study I identify recurring rhetorical tactics in order to identify and analyze rhetorical strategies that are used when cultural tensions and discursive differences arise among coalition participants in internal coalition communication. I have found that the rhetorical strategies of coalition maintenance operate within a comic master frame, which I will describe briefly next, and explicate in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

The Comic Frame

A comic frame, as Burke (1959) describes it, is a "charitable" frame of acceptance that eschews violence and promotes unity or peaceful ways to address social problems without being "gullible" or overly trusting of others (p.107). As Plec and Pettenger (2012) point out, frames are "amplifying devices, highlighting some features of a circumstance, and orienting us toward some manner of action" (p. 464). Therefore, "comic green frames" are oriented toward the "mobilization of individuals and community groups" to stimulate "awareness and action" aimed at creating healthy environmental futures (p. 471). In this case study, RWD is a coalition of individuals and organizations that disseminate rhetoric to mobilize people and to stimulate awareness and action toward healthy and sustainable rural (water) futures. In order to serve this purpose, RWD participants must negotiate their internal differences with an eye toward durable relationships in order to function as an efficacious collective. To do this, they must find ways to scrutinize each other's premises and assumptions, while seeking to influence one another and deliberate mutual decisions without harming relationships. I have found that RWD accomplishes these communicative challenges using a master comic frame - an appropriate frame for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences in internal

coalition communication. I will explicate this concept in the theoretical framework and analysis chapters.

The definitions that I have provided above are not exhaustive of the key terms within this manuscript. I will offer additional definitions along the way and when they are most relevant. Now that I have defined many key terms, I will preview the chapters to follow.

Chapter Preview

This manuscript proceeds in five chapters. The second chapter presents a theoretical framework, a review of my research questions, and the primary literatures that informed the project, as well as a brief introduction of the case. In the third chapter, I describe the methods I used, including a rationale for combining rhetorical analysis with qualitative field methods. The fourth and fifth chapters are analysis chapters.

In the fourth chapter I identify and explore four types of humor as rhetorical strategies in RWD internal coalition communication and maintenance. These are lighthearted humor; self-deprecating humor; satire and irony; and humor at the expense of others. Each of these types of humor operate within a comic master frame, but I have found that in particular *kairotic* moments, melodramatic humor happens. In these cases, the humor is primarily directed toward targets that are external to the coalition. In this way, melodramatic humor does not disrupt the master comic frame used for internal coalition communication.

The fifth chapter focuses on process literacy as a rhetorical strategy and best practice in coalition maintenance. This concept involves pivoting communication across shifting rhetorical frameworks toward collaboration and mutual decisions. In this chapter,

I also discuss capacity indicators or characteristics of process literacy as well as best practices in process literacy.

Recall that the overarching theoretical question behind this research is: In environmental controversies, what rhetorical tactics and strategies enable or constrain coalition maintenance as participants negotiate cultural tensions and discursive difference within coalitions? After a three and a half year research process, I am excited to report my findings in support of coalition maintenance. After presenting my analysis chapters, I will synthesize these findings, further explicate ways in which these findings contribute to communication scholarship and pose ideas for additional research on the rhetorical tactics and strategies of coalition communication in environmental conflicts toward more democratic and sustainable futures.

Notes

[1] This argument is not intended to overlook the connection between environmental and human health. The environmental justice movement calls into question this intersection particularly with regard to marginalized publics (e.g., see Bullard, 1994; Pezzullo & Sandler, 2007; Szasz, 1994).

[2]These state names are generic pseudonyms. Pseudonyms will be used throughout this text for all proper names, except for the names of governmental institutions in order to protect the identities of individuals and organizations involved in this particular water dispute.

[3]I am calling RWD a coalition because it is a consortium of disparate interests that have coalesced in response to a common threat. This coalition is officially a non-profit organization with private funding and a few staff members, but they loosely convene participants or actors with disparate affiliations and interests under the umbrella of RWD and collectively strategize toward preventing a common threat (e.g., the proposed aqueduct project).

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL SCAFFOLDING

Recall that the overarching theoretical question for this project seeks to understand what rhetorical tactics and strategies enable or constrain coalition maintenance as participants negotiate cultural tensions and discursive difference within the context of internal environmental coalition communication. My theoretical framework to approach this research combines (1) democratic theory, specifically deliberative democracy; (2) conflict theory, particularly dialogue and alternative dispute resolution theories; and (3) contemporary rhetorical theory, which illuminates how events, objects, practices and texts, written or performed by rhetors are framed and taken up by audiences within a broad range of contexts. Each offers resources to guide my analysis and each reflects assumptions that call for self-reflexivity or an awareness of and transparency about my positionality relative to these assumptions when I take on various roles as rhetor, (co)author, participant observer, and critic (see the methods section for further explanation). Next, I will describe each of the theories and its relationship to this project.

Democratic Theory

Democratic theory, although not specifically a study of communication, provides resources to illuminate the communicative discourses, practices, and processes that seek to uphold principles of democracy such as liberty, equality, and justice. This is important to an understanding of coalitions because they often form in response to controversies over and (perceived) violations of these highly valued democratic principles, especially within the context of the United States.[4] For example, in the case of the RWD, coalition participants are resisting UWD's proposal to drill for ancient aquifer water in rural Desert and Mountain states for the purpose of moving the water to Urbana. Aqueduct opponents perceive the proposal as a "water grab" (a common epithet used in the western U.S. for large scale water projects) by powerful elites with large sums of financial and political capital. They are fighting for freedom to carry on their livelihoods, equality for rural interests, and justice for the inhabitants of a fragile and arid ecosystem.

With this research, I aim to extend understandings of deliberative democracy and participation by studying a coalition as one site where deliberative democracy gets operationalized. RWD is a mode of association where deliberative democracy, public participation, and environmental decision making all intersect. Democratic theory, particularly the model of deliberative democracy, provides a theoretical framework for advancing knowledge at this intersection. I could not say at the inception of this research what my specific contribution would be. However, it was my hope that studying the rhetorical tactics and strategies of negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences involved with environmental coalition maintenance could help advance our understandings about ways to negotiate cultural tensions and discursive differences in

multicultural deliberative democracy. My findings take an incremental step in that direction. As my analysis chapters reveal, within a comic master frame, humor (used appropriately) and process literacy are significant rhetorical strategies in internal coalition maintenance and by extension, may be important in deliberative democracy.

Before addressing the relationship between democratic theory and communication, I will briefly outline some of the models of democratic theory that guide my work. Democratic theory, a subfield or domain of political science, treats models of government that include rule by the people. Cunningham (2002) and Held (1987) describe a range of models including: liberal, pragmatic, deliberative, and participatory democracies as well as classic and radical pluralism. Theories about democracy (a highly contested term) often turn on assumptions about forms and degrees of participation by citizens in democratic decision-making. The more radical participatory models emphasize direct forms of participation and decision-making in the public sphere (e.g., Arendt, 1963; Barber, 1984; Mouffe, 2000). Models of democracy that assume both direct and indirect forms of participation, such as developmental, deliberative and liberal models, draw on Jon Stuart Mill's formulation, which creates a series of checks and balances to protect the individual rights of minorities and prevent tyrannical abuses of power by the majority (e.g., Held, 1996; Macpherson, 1977).

I am drawn to the deliberative democracy model because it emphasizes the importance of communication. This model opens up a space for and seeks the institutionalization of the *conditions* for deliberative communication in the public sphere and in governmental decision-making processes (Cunningham, 2002). Since deliberation entails the interchange of ideas that encourages the identification of collective

preferences toward a common good, this approach assumes that specific interests and values get identified, understood, influenced, and constituted through deliberative exchanges and the circulation of discourses among publics and decision-makers over time. Deliberative democracy is a dynamic and communicative approach to democracy, which relates to my study of coalition rhetoric because coalitions require internal deliberations, within flattened hierarchies, in order to make collective decisions. Moreover, coalitions operate at the blurred interface of the public sphere and institutionalized decision-making processes, which relates to my study because RWD is comprised of mainstream and vernacular voices or stakeholders from affected publics and counter-publics (e.g., Asen, 2000; Asen & Brouwer, 2001; Brouwer & Asen, 2010; Fraser, 2007; Hauser, 1999; Ono & Sloop, 1995) that convene, in part, because opportunities for authentic dialogue in more formal or institutional decision making processes are limited (e.g., Cheney, 2013).

In addition to the assumptions of deliberative democracy, which I will describe more thoroughly below, this study of coalitions calls for democratic theory that accounts for cultural and discursive differences. The normative goal of seeking consensus on common goods is legitimately critiqued by radical pluralists like Mouffe (1993) because deliberative processes privilege articulate voices and tend to uphold dominant discourses while silencing or marginalizing the inarticulate and alternative voices. However, deliberative democracy assumes an active and de-centered public sphere, including *dissensus* that can accommodate alternative forums for direct participation in decision-making by diverse publics as well as by informed indirect decision-making processes through representation.

Scholars are struggling to theorize how large-scale democracies, particularly those paired with capitalism, can hold up the ideals of broad (indirect and direct) public participation, equality, and justice across a widely diverse and multicultural polity (e.g., Dahl, 1996; O'Flynn, 2006; Tilly, 2007). The idea of democracy emerged 2500 years ago in Greece where it was practiced at the level of city-states, a scale that can accommodate inclusive participation across diverse groups. Large scale applications of democracy, such as at a nation-state level, or at international levels like the European Union or the United Nations, suffer encumbrances when seeking to be inclusive of diverse interests[5] (see, e.g., Benhabib, 1996; Cunningham, 2002; Habermas, 1984, 1991).

We can see that these problems of democracy have implications for environmental decision-making as well as for coalitions that can form to advance democratic ideals of liberty, equality, and justice. Making democracy work under the conditions of multicultural publics and large scale democracy, requires a model that opens spaces, accommodates and develops new forms of participation to create the conditions for deliberation within the civic sphere and at the interface with sovereign decision-makers (e.g., Cox, 2010). Descriptions of new participatory forms such as cultural activism (e.g., Delicath, 2004); community dialogues (e.g., Spano, 2001); collaborative learning opportunities (Walker, 2004), and third party or alternative dispute resolution processes (e.g., Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988; Coalition for Utah's Future, 1995) are emerging in the literature. These are important examples of participatory communication processes that create the conditions for deliberation among diverse publics and institutional decision-makers. Environmental coalitions deserve attention because they can function to create civic spaces for deliberation. Moreover, internal

environmental coalition communication is a node where multicultural deliberation happens. I turn, now, to assumptions in the deliberative model that are problematized by multiculturalism.

The deliberative democracy model is based on Habermas' (1991) de-centered public sphere, which assumes that citizens can deliberate differences and achieve a rational consensus for the common good in spite of an array of significant social, economic and cultural differences. Benhabib (1996) a deliberative democracy theorist, conceptualizes democracy as a:

> model for organizing the collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of a society on the basis of the principle that decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals. (p.68)

Benhabib (1996) agrees with Habermas' discourse theory of democracy, but departs from his clean breaks among "ethical, political, and moral discourses," as do I (p.7). She argues that "cultural forms of communication," including "identities and visions of the good life," are not so easily bracketed from political discourses and deliberation over what is "right" and "good" (p.7). This certainly rings true in the context of RWD coalition deliberations. We might view coalitions, given their heterogeneity, as a microcosm of democracy. Thus, when cultural tensions and discursive differences constrain deliberation, how these tensions and differences get negotiated matters.

Benhabib's (2002) treatment of deliberative democracy interweaves "empirical and normative considerations," to demonstrate that "a modernist view of cultures as contested creations of meaning and a universalist view of deliberative democracy complement one another" (p. xi). For Benhabib, a vibrant deliberative democracy can

accommodate both "cultural self-ascription and collective intergroup justice" (p. x). I hold hope that Benhabib is correct. While I am not sure that I would term Behabib's definition of culture "modern" because contestation of meanings implies unstable identities and social realities more prevalently described in a post-modern condition, I have found that RWD is a site where the dynamics of "cultural self-ascription and collective intergroup justice" happen. For example, as I will describe more fully in the analysis chapters, RWD uses humor and process literacy as rhetorical strategies for dealing with disparate cultural identities (e.g., native, rancher, and environmentalist) within a comic frame that supports mutual respect across differences.

As Benhabib (2002) explicates, this deliberative model assumes that all matters of public concern must be free and open to "unconstrained public deliberation" (p. 68). This model assumes a "practical rationality" and a "reflexivity condition" to procedurally challenge first level misinterpretations or abuses at "meta-levels" (p.72). These procedural specifications "privilege a *plurality of modes of association* in which all affected can have the right to articulate their point of view" in forums such as political parties, social movements, networks, and the like (p.73). Such forums (to which we might add coalitions) overlap and interlock to form a "*public conversation,"* which assumes "moral respect" and "egalitarian reciprocity" (p. 78-79). Agreements reached with minorities and dissenters must be noncoercive and the meanings and norms of moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity are a "consequence of discourses themselves" (p.79). Benhabib's assumptions for deliberative democracy highlight the significance of communication for achieving these (ideal speech) conditions because communication

theory informs us about the symbolic and constitutive aspects of discourse, identity constructions, and conditions for creating open communication climates.

I argue that internal coalition deliberation is a locus where these assumptions of deliberative democracy can be studied. Coalition participants presumably have an incentive to practice "moral respect" and "egalitarian reciprocity" so as to remain in relationship with one another, despite major disagreements among participants that might arise, in order to collectively achieve certain ends. Thus, analyzing conflict communication in this context is a node for examining Benhabib's assumptions. I argue that looking at the discursive differences and cultural tensions in coalition maintenance is one way to do this, because these are loci where identities are vulnerable and the conditions of moral respect, egalitarian reciprocity, and open communication get put to the test. Therefore, learning about rhetorical tactics and strategies that enable or constrain coalition maintenance can contribute to theory about creating the conditions for a more participatory, deliberative, and environmental democracy.

In my study I am assuming that principles of democracy, particularly participatory and deliberative democracy, are a crucial aspect of what I am defining as coalition maintenance. I am also assuming that it is through discourse, particularly rhetorical strategies, that we see how coalition participants attempt to engage with these abstract concepts of deliberative democracy and participation in practice.

A deeper democracy includes a broader understanding of what counts as participation across diverse publics and discourses that acknowledges perspectives well beyond hegemonic and anthropocentric perspectives (e.g., Callister, in press; DeLuca, 2007; Peterson, Peterson & Peterson, 2007; Rogers, 1998). I wish to advance these ideals

through developing knowledge about that which constrains and enables the articulation of conflicting and marginalized interests of diverse and multicultural publics in the context of internal environmental coalition communication and decision-making. This is a context in which, for example, anthropocentric and more eco-centered discourses collide.

Conflict and Dialogue Theory

The second area I will draw from is conflict theory. Conflict theory, an interdiscipline, describes substantive, relational, and processual dynamics that affect communication climates in the face of (perceived) mutual incompatibilities (e.g., Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988; Deetz & Simpson, 1999; Kellet & Dalton, 2001; Mindel, 1995; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Zoller, 2004). Analyzing what is uttered, how it is uttered, and the context in which an uttering occurs is vital to understanding and addressing conflict dynamics (e.g., Hawes, 2003). Conflict resolution literature (often referred to as alternative dispute resolution or ADR) theorizes approaches to and processes for resolving conflicts. This literature, especially that which treats mediation (e.g. Cloke, 2001; Moore, 1986), assumes that parties are capable of resolving disputes in a mutually agreeable fashion and that imbalanced power relationships can be leveled (Folger & Bush, 2001).

The assumptions in conflict resolution theory are generally compatible with the principles of deliberative democracy outlined above. For example, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and collaborative learning contribute to understandings about creative communicative processes and practices that foster inclusive and democratic participation (Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988; Cloke, 2001; Daniels &Walker, 2001). Identifying

rhetorical tactics and strategies associated with negotiating cultural tensions and discursive difference among coalition members will contribute to this literature by illuminating nuanced challenges faced by coalition participants - especially those in a facilitative role - who privilege inclusive participation and self-determination in the presence of abundant diversity.

I am particularly interested in dialogue theory, a communication focused domain of conflict theory, because dialogue can facilitate respect and understanding without trying to reconcile differences. Dialogue theory describes the communicative processes required to dwell in the spaces where tensions exist without the (immediate) impulse to resolve them. Deep listening and suspension of judgments are both essential to developing heightened awareness of divergent perspectives. I have found that the successful negotiation of cultural tensions and discursive differences within the context of coalition maintenance requires dialogue. Dialogue can provide openings or windows into deeper understandings of cultural tensions and discursive differences, which can develop empathy and respect for others with radically different cultural backgrounds and speech codes. The development of empathy and respect for others within a group of participants with diverse cultures can facilitate the identification of options for mutual gain. As with deliberative democracy, dialogue and ADR theories are limited by the assumption that moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity are present among actors or that these tenants can be manifested through intentional forms of communication. I will discuss dialogue as a key part of process literacy in the fifth chapter. In short, the capacity to practice authentic dialogue is also an important element of coalition maintenance.

Conflict and dialogue theory contribute to a deliberative democracy model because they illuminate communicative processes that facilitate open communication climates for deliberation in the wake of significant difference (including but not limited to cultural tensions and discursive difference). Together, they help create a theoretical framework for understanding how differences get negotiated within coalitions and how a deliberative democracy might better accommodate marginalized publics in the context of coalition participation in institutionalized environmental decision-making processes. In reciprocal fashion, I aim to contribute to the conflict and dialogue theory literatures by bringing a focus to the significance of rhetorical framing in conflict communication. Studying rhetorical tactics and strategies of negotiating differences in environmental coalitions has contributed to conflict theory in at least two ways. First, it extends contexts in conflict theory to coalitions. Secondly, and more importantly, contemporary rhetorical theory emphasizes audience reception of rhetorically framed messages used among publics. This emphasis on the rhetorical framing of messages and their respective resonance with audiences expands conflict theory, by putting processual models for resolving conflicts (e.g., mediation, facilitation, and dialogue) into conversation with the rhetorical framing of messages. I will discuss this more thoroughly in the fifth chapter where I explicate how process literacy, as a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance, operationalizes these conflict models within a collaborative communicative genre and across distinct rhetorical frameworks.

Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

Rhetorical theory is significant to this project because it focuses on the strategies and tactics of influence (or persuasion) in internal coalition maintenance. Further, some threads of rhetorical theory assume the significance and desirability of deliberative democracy. Rhetoric dates back some 2500 years to Greek civilization, when notions about democracy arose. Aristotle believed that for citizens to fully participate in public matters, they needed to be able to speak well and deliberate issues of the day. Contemporary rhetorical theory builds from and beyond these roots.[6] Dickinson, Blair and Ott (2010) define rhetoric as "the study of discourses, events, objects and practices that attends to their character as meaningful, legible, partisan, and consequential" (p.2). Dickinson et al. view rhetoric as "a set of theoretical stances and critical tactics that offer ways of understanding, evaluating, and intervening in a broad range of human activities" (p.3). For this project, I adopt this definition of rhetoric, since it enables me to treat coalition rhetoric as speech acts in internal coalition communication (e.g., participation and deliberation in large group strategy meetings). It also sanctions intervention in these productions of social conditions (the act of rhetorical criticism).

I have drawn from understandings about the constitutive aspects of rhetoric. For example, rhetorical theory that treats relationships between nature and culture helped me to identify and understand the collision of nature- and human- centered discourses in internal coalition communication (e.g., Carbaugh, 1999; Norton, 1984; Rogers, 1998). In conceptualizing RWD as a heterogeneous slice of the *demos,* rhetorical framing informed my analysis of what enables and constrains open communication climates in internal coalition maintenance (e.g., Doxtader, 2000; Foss & Griffin, 1995; Gastil, 1993). My

research is also informed by rhetorical theory that treats social movement (e.g., DeLuca, 1999; Endres, Sprain & Peterson, 2009; Morris & Browne, 2006; Pezzullo, 2003, 2007), particularly rhetorical tactics for internal audiences (e.g., Dow, 1994; Gregg, 1971; Lake, 1983).

My findings contribute to rhetorical theory since little has been written about coalitions as a context for rhetorical analysis (e.g., Endres, Clarke, Garrison & Peterson, 2009; Pezzullo, 2003) or about dialogue, mediation, and facilitation as conflict communication models within shifting rhetorical frameworks and communicative genres. This case study does this in addition to discovering that humor and process literacy are rhetorical strategies in internal coalition maintenance.

Moreover, through an inductive (or emic) analysis process, Kenneth Burke's (1959) foundational work on the comic frame became salient. I had noticed that humor was a common feature in RWD group interactions. I began exploring Kenneth Burke's (1959) work on literary frames, including comedy, but realized, in reviewing this scholarship, that RWD internal coalition communication predominantly happens within a comic master frame. This became a broad theoretical framework for both of the analysis chapters. As such, I will introduce features of the comic frame here and elaborate on them, as relevant in the subsequent analysis chapters.

The Comic Frame as a Master Frame for RWD Coalition Communication

The comic frame, as Burke (1959) describes it, is a "charitable" frame of acceptance that eschews violence and promotes unity or peaceful ways to address social problems without being "gullible" or overly trusting of others (p.107). Skepticism, irony,

parody, criticism, conflict, mediation, negotiation, consensus, irreconcilable differences, dialogue, deliberation, reconciliation, argumentation, invention, and discontent - each of these has a home in a comic frame. However, physical and verbal forms of violence or those that denigrate the character of disputants are not readily accommodated within a comic frame. A comic frame holds out hope that those, who may be mistaken, will realize it and change. A comic frame makes room for (self)criticism and opens opportunities for change by recognizing, for example, that most of us in industrialized societies are complicit in complex eco-social problems to some degree or another. It shifts the attitude or motive away from the impulse to blame to a more systemic form of query. The motive in a comic frame is to heighten awareness of the underlying societal pressures that converge to create complex issues, and to identify and learn from mistakes so as to prevent them from recurring.[7]

Burke (1959) suggests that the comic frame relieves the pressure towards opportunism [or selling out] by a broadening, or maturing, of sectarian thought" (pp. 102, 306). A comic frame supports collaboration. In a comic frame, disputants take time for cooperative argumentation (Makau & Marty, 2001) and meta-communication about their differences to gain diverse perspective and to become clear about differences. In the process, rhetors are tough on the issues and gentle with relationships. In Chapters 4 and 5 I will elaborate on the comic frame as an appropriate master frame for internal coalition communication and maintenance.

My dissertation contributes to our understanding of the comic master frame by showing how it enables productive internal coalition communication, especially during conflict situations, toward coalition maintenance. A corollary to this finding that I discuss

in Chapter 4 is that in certain *kairotic* moments, the melodramatic frame can be used during internal coalition communication without disrupting the comic master frame. Next, I will explain why putting democratic, conflict and rhetorical theories in conversation have benefited this project.

Putting Democracy, Conflict and Rhetoric in Conversation

Combining democratic theory, conflict theory, and contemporary rhetorical theory into a theoretical framework for this project enables the strengths found within each theory to inform the weaknesses or gaps found in the others. Simply put, the contributions these three theoretical assumptions provide to this project are: (1) democratic theory informs participation in decision making, (2) conflict theory informs participation in conflict, and (3) rhetorical theory informs (audience) persuasion within decision making and conflict. Environmental coalitions engage in all three of these complex theoretical domains because they use rhetorical tactics and strategies to influence decisions and to negotiate conflicts.

Moreover, putting all three domains in conversation compensates for the potential weaknesses of each. Participatory and deliberative democracy assume the ideal of self-governance by a body politic, but fail to fully account for how power is produced and circulates within democratic institutions, systems, and everyday practices. Conflict theory and contemporary rhetorical theory can help address this. Conflict theory provides ideas for alternative creative practices, processes, and communicative models that produce opportunities to maximize inclusive participation in the presence of more oppressive forms of power or moral differences that recognize interdependent futures, but it does so

without much influence from rhetorical theory. Contemporary rhetorical theory offers ways to understand how discourses form, circulate, resonate and get disrupted, but little attention has been paid to the rhetorical tactics and strategies for negotiating discursive and cultural differences in the context of participatory and deliberative democracy.[8] Here, democratic theory and ADR models can begin to shed light on how coalition participants negotiate their internal differences with an eye toward inclusive participation and coalition maintenance.

I posited that putting these theoretical perspectives into conversation in the context of internal coalition communication might illuminate new pathways for understanding participatory and deliberative democracy in the context of multicultural tensions and increasing environmental degradation, where discursive difference is abundant and power is inexorably at work. As I will demonstrate, this theoretical scaffolding proved fruitful, especially for understanding rhetorical strategies for negotiating discursive difference and cultural tensions in coalition maintenance.

Research Questions

I approached this case study with the following main question: In environmental controversies, what rhetorical tactics and strategies enable or constrain coalition maintenance as participants negotiate cultural tensions and discursive difference within coalitions? Moreover, I narrowed my inquiry to two more specific research questions:

RQ1: What are the rhetorical tactics and strategies that respond to cultural tensions and discursive differences within coalitions and do they enable or constrain the ability to negotiate these differences?

RQ2: What are the rhetorical tactics and strategies of (dis)engagement and (non)participation in *maintaining* coalitions, especially those used for internal coalition audiences?

The first research question (RQ1) allowed me to explore rhetorical tactics and strategies that constrained or enabled the communication climate among coalition participants (i.e., in moments of internal conflict). The second research question (RQ2) enabled me to discern the effects of rhetorical tactics and strategies used with internal coalition communication in support of coalition maintenance. The findings in answer to these two research questions contribute to understanding best practices for working with cultural tensions and discursive differences in coalition communication and for maintaining environmental coalitions. In the next section, I will review the primary literatures that will inform this project.

Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, a wide range of interdisciplinary literatures treat coalitions such as game theory; computer science; political science; management; negotiation; organizational development and a host of communication subdisciplines (e.g., organizational communication, new media, risk, health, and strategic communication). While some of the literatures outside of the communication discipline were useful when I took on the inductive process of analysis described in Chapter 3, communication literature is of primary relevance because it deals directly with participatory communication and the role of discourse and rhetoric in meaning making practices and the social construction of reality. The social construction of reality, implies the possibility

of constructing radically different institutionalized realities from those that exist, today, which provides hope for and fear of (depending on one's standpoint) the immediate possibilities for change in water policy and water provision as well as the potential for more (or less) sustainable water futures. Moreover, the communication literature offers a many resources for describing and interpreting *participatory* forms of communication across a broad range of relevant contexts.

I have drawn on knowledge primarily from within the field of communication and its relevant subdisciplines. These bodies of literature include: (1) (extra-environmental) participatory communication, particularly from the subdiscipline of organizational communication (including small group research); (2) social movement rhetoric that analyzes strategies for swaying internal audiences; and (3) intergroup communication, specifically cultural identity theory (CIT) that deals with constructions of identity that can underpin cultural tensions and discursive differences. Next I will review this participatory communication literature, which I extend in the relevant analysis chapters.

(Extra-Environmental) Participatory Communication Literature

Participatory communication, a body of literature that is influenced by democratic theory (e.g., Dahl, 1996; Held, 1987; Tilly, 2007), social theory (e.g., Durkheim, 1950; Giddens, 2005; Weber, 1946); critical theory (e.g., Derrida, 2002; Foucault, 1972; Gramsci, 1971); cultural theory (e.g.,Hall, 1996; Orbe, 1998) and feminist theory (e.g., Ashcraft, 1999; Blair et al., 1994; Ferguson, 1984) deals specifically with participation within the domain of communication theory. Participatory communication is also an element in environmental communication literature, but most of this scholarship treats

public participation, which is beyond the scope of this study. I draw from an intra-disciplinary treatment of participation across meso- to macro- contexts, including those found in organizational communication that treat participation in democratic workplaces within flatter or flattened hierarchies and participation at a community based level because these are the contexts that most closely apply to coalition structures.

Participatory communication relates to my study of coalitions because it treats participation as a form of individual agency and engagement with others in pursuit of ideas, values, interests or goals. Recall my working definition of a coalition as a loosely held network of diverse actors, with disparate backgrounds and cultural traditions, joined together to share information to advance a common purpose or cause. Thus, internal coalition communication (as I am defining it) is participatory communication. It deals with the tension between liberty and democracy. Individual freedom creates friction within a collective when ideas, values, interests and goals diverge. Even with the best intentions to create flattened hierarchies and inclusive processes to reach collective decisions, dilemmas arise.

Cheney et al. (1998) inform us that what counts as participation may or may not involve self-determination. This decoupling of participation and self-determination can create disillusionment in participatory processes. Fiorino (1996) describes this phenomenon as the "participation gap" or the disconnection between expectations associated with participation and actual outcomes. The participation gap has primarily signified gaps between public participation and institutional (or more formal and external) decision-making processes, but this concept is applicable within other multicultural contexts (or less formal and internal coalitional) decision-making processes,

as well. In other words, rhetorical strategies for negotiating significant differences within coalitions in the context of environmental disputes may be able to contribute to knowledge toward narrowing this "participation gap." Since successful appeals for reaching diverse audiences can influence symbolic meanings and affect decision-making outcomes, that which enables democratic participation and decision-making in internal coalition deliberation, given a heterogeneous composition and associated reach into a diverse array of societal sectors, may have application in other organizational contexts. To be efficacious, coalitions must be durable and healthy; in other words, they must attend to coalition maintenance. As follows, the findings from this case study may contribute to democratic theory and relevant works in communication subdisciplines that deal specifically with participatory communication such as organizational communication because that which enables participation and democratic decision making in RWD (e.g., appropriate forms of humor and process literacy) may be applicable in other democratic and organizational contexts.

Organizational Contexts for Participatory Communication

Within the subdiscipline of organizational communication are treatments of participation (e.g., Putnam & Krone, 2006) in democratic workplace structures (or relatively flattened hierarchies). Coalitions tend to be flatter or loosely organized structures designed for collective action in the public sphere. Studying participation as an internal coalition communication process extends the context in which participation is treated within this corpus of communication literature.

Critical organizational communication literature informs us that participation can be administrated as a form of managerial control (Barker, 1993). Under these coercive conditions, we see that participation is severed from the democratic values of voluntary self-determination and that it can manifest in self-directed and regulatory forms of *disciplinary power* (Foucault, 1994) or *concertive control* (Cheney & Tompkins, 1985). Stohl and Cheney (2001) discuss the paradoxical aspects of participatory processes and practices including structure, agency, identity and power. These authors claim,

> some encounter with pragmatic paradox is almost inevitable because certain efforts to promote democratic participation will tend toward undermining their desired outcomes. This is in large part due to the interaction of structure and process in communicative practice that is directed toward widening the space for action; there will be instances of efforts that create their own undoing as we try to engineer democracy. (p. 356)

This research suggests that the paradoxical aspects of structure, agency, identity and power in participatory communication processes may be nodes where conflicts in internal coalition deliberation arise. My findings certainly support this line of thinking. Moreover, this case study in rhetorical strategies for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive difference in coalition maintenance extends knowledge in this (inter)organizational domain of participatory communication because, while Stohl and Cheney (2001) identify these paradoxes within democratic and participatory communicative processes, they do not suggest how these paradoxes might be addressed. My findings suggest that appropriate humor and process literacy are productive responses in situations when conflicts associated with these paradoxes arise. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Further, Cheney et al. (1998) infer that the broader culture (within which coalitions are embedded) can influence the degree to which democratic practices and participation are linked and they suggest the need to continually scrutinize work structures that are formed to serve democratic interests. Here, governmental agencies that are mandated to integrate public participation processes are no exception. In fact, coalitions such as the RWD often form because participation and collaborative decision-making are loosely linked, if at all. In the wake of the inter-basin aqueduct proposal, RWD participants commonly lament, deliberate, and strategize ways to address what they perceive to be a guise of public participation in the relevant decision-making processes offered to publics by state and federal agencies. RWD, as I will demonstrate in the analysis chapters, is a highly participatory and multicultural (interorganizational) group that routinely and successfully practices democratic decision-making. Thus, that which serves participatory and collaborative decision-making in RWD (e.g., appropriate humor and process literacy – both significant aspects of coalition maintenance) may have application in other multicultural (interorganizational) contexts where broader and deeper democracy is desired.

In Cheney's (1999) analysis of Mondragon, a worker-owned and -governed network of cooperatives in northern Spain's Basque region, he describes the challenges this cooperative organization faces and the lessons learned in attempting to hold onto its social values (of cooperative decision-making) while competing in a global economy that privileges efficiency and fiscal competition. Cheney asserts that democracy in the workplace should be assessed on two broad levels: specific opportunities by employees to

contribute to the development of business strategy and the ways "participation" itself is open to negotiation by employees (p. 160). I have found this bi-level assessment is useful for evaluating democratic practices within RWD - by these standards - a highly democratic coalition.

Similarly, we can apply this bi-level assessment to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), which is under the constant bombardment of market pressures to exploit natural resources. Findings ways to create and fund interactive forums for genuinely engaging diverse publics in dialogue and deliberation over how to create sustainable environmental futures along with a means for collectively determining them remain major challenges for bureaucratic agencies at both levels. Such a vision requires alternative structures and processes for participatory communication within the context of a larger decision space (Walker, 2004) at community, watershed, and regional levels.

Community Dialogue and Participation

The heterogeneous complexities that comprise communities are similar to those in coalitions. We might think of a coalition as a sample or subset of a broader community or region. Thus, my research findings on the rhetorical tactics and strategies for negotiating tensions and discursive differences within coalitions toward coalition maintenance relate to participatory communication in the context of community dialogue and dispute resolution, an area of research that is under-represented in the communication literature.

Spano's (2001) case study in the community of Cupertino, CA, is one exception. It offers insights into best practices and lessons learned through the facilitation of dialogues involving multicultural and multigenerational problems at a community-based

level. In addition to suggesting ways to improve community dialogue processes and participatory democracy, Spano delineates the transparent and unique subject positions of various community dialogue participants (e.g., county commissioners, police officers, city officials, educators, etc.) This work is a useful resource for thinking through complex coalition systems, how they are constituted, and the (un)institutionalized decisions that they can influence. Spano's model of participatory communication assumes that engaged and self-reflexive citizens can collectively evaluate judgments that are in the interest of the common good. Drawing on Habermas' *ideal speech situation*, Spano claims "the challenge for groups and organizations committed to reinvigorating democratic participation is to create the conditions…where real people are engaged in common decision-making activities that have physical, material, and social outcomes" (p. 25).

Moreover, Spano's community dialogue model offers a way to think about participation and hybrid roles. For example, an individual might participate directly in a community dialogue process aimed at collaboratively identifying ways to mitigate a major community problem, while concurrently holding a subject position as a representational decision-maker for related decisions in an institutionalized context. The same principle can apply in the context of coalition communication systems. Coalitions seeking to influence outcomes on related decisions may share information during strategy sessions that directly or indirectly affect subsequent institutionalized decisions.

This notion of subject hybridity helps me to think about the mixed bag of identities, associations, and memberships held by coalition participants. In the case of the RWD, participants not only cross community and watershed boundaries, but they also cross nation-state boundaries. For example, participants in RWD include members of

American Indian tribes that are indigenous to the area. Moreover, some RWD participants hold positions in county and federal government. This cross-jurisdictional intersection calls forth an even broader milieu of participatory communication literatures.

Participatory Communication in a Globalized World

I bring this next piece of participation literature to the fore, because White's (1999) criteria for grassroots development relates to coalition maintenance. When it comes to water issues in the West, we see layers of dominance or situations where the interests of those with access to more resources are privileged over the interests of those with less. Senior water rights trump junior water rights, and urban demands are creating material flows that threaten rural and smaller scale agrarian interests. Moreover, dominant colonial practices continue to marginalize indigenous peoples, who in the case of the RWD are negotiating the tricky waters of participating in collaboration with locals and coalition participants to fight more distal governmental policies and economic flows that drive decisions and impact local realties on the ground. Given the diversity of participants in the RWD (e.g., individuals who identify with dominant and non-dominant cultural groups) assumptions about what is in the best interest of non-dominant groups by dominant group participants could undermine coalition maintenance.

White's (1999) four principles for grass roots development projects ring true to the practices I have observed at the RWD meetings. I have observed moments where overtures by coalition consultants to help members of traditionally marginalized groups are treated with a delicate sensitivity and awareness of power relations. I have also witnessed moments when resistance is palpable in spite of these practiced sensitivities.

The same holds true for some of the urban consultants that are collaborating with rural communities. While my research findings do not treat power as an explicit topic, discursive difference and cultural tensions are constitutive of power relations within specific socio-historic contexts. Thus, this case study (particularly the analysis chapter on process literacy) contributes to participatory communication literature by explicating rhetorical strategies for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive difference (i.e., power relations) within a comic frame. This is important information for moving toward grass-roots, community-based development in a postcolonial and globalized world.

White (1999) examines Third World development practices with a focus on cultural sensitivity and grassroots discourse. This participatory approach adopts Ferguson's stance that "often aid 'does not help the hungry as it is supposed to, it only strengthens the powerful'"(p. 31). White's focus is on democratic approaches for sharing knowledge so that ordinary people can have control over the process of knowing and can link this to action from outside of institutionalized processes to affect change. Therefore the control of the process remains in the hands of the local community members or put another way, the process is community-based. This form of democratic participation is closely linked to coalition practices that I have observed with RWD. Thus, best practices of process literacy in coalition maintenance for RWD may have application in this context of community-based development.

Also within this more macro-context of relevant participatory communication literature, we find what is sometimes called "globalization from below." Studying rhetorical dynamics of coalition communication in environmental disputes can serve to extend these participatory communication literatures to environmental conflicts in ways

that are highly relevant to sustainable futures. Stohl (2005) theorizes globalization from an organizational communication perspective and Ganesh, Zoller and Cheney (2005) argue for the expansion of organizational communication contexts to sites of resistance from below. The RWD is certainly a site of resistance from below because participants have formed a grassroots group that is fighting external political and economic forces, which threaten a geographic area and the life systems within it.

Summary

In summary, literatures in participatory communication across micro-, meso-, and macro- contexts inform this project. My findings contribute to these participatory communication literatures that sit at the crossroads of organizational communication, community dialogue, and grassroots development by identifying rhetorical strategies that function to maintain cohesion across multicultural differences in decision-making processes within flattened hierarchies. I am also suggesting that rhetorical strategies that serve coalition maintenance might offer clues for ways to broaden and deepen democracy in other (inter)organizational, community-based, and institutional contexts. Moreover, the motivation to participate in democratic processes is linked to the expectation to influence outcomes. This brings to the foreground the relevance of social movement literature, especially that which deals with protest rhetoric and internal audiences.

Participatory Communication and Social Movement

Social movement theory, an interdiscipline within the social sciences and humanities, explores why social mobilization occurs. Theories span sociology, political

science, philosophy, economics, cultural studies and rhetoric. Among these theories there are literatures that look at new social movements with an emphasis on identity and culture (see, e.g., Jasper, 1997; Schutten, 2007; Tilly, 2004). Given my focus on rhetorical tactics and strategies in coalition maintenance, I am most interested in social movement literature pertaining to internal rhetoric amongst movement members.

There is extensive literature that treats external rhetoric (e.g., DeLuca,1999a; Endres et al., 2009; Griffin, 1952; Habermas, 1984, 1991; Lake, 1983; Szasz, 1994; Zaeske, 1995), but scholars have paid far less attention to rhetorical tactics and strategies of internal rhetoric (e.g., Dow, 1994; Endres et al., 2009; Gregg, 1971; Lake, 1983). Also, as I argued in the introduction, coalition maintenance is part and parcel to the potential rhetorical force that coalitions hold, and that which keeps coalitions healthy is not well represented in the rhetoric of social protest literature (e.g., Morris & Browne, 2006). This study shows that internal rhetoric is important because it can make the difference between whether a coalition is healthy, durable and efficacious. My findings contribute to the literature devoted to internal rhetoric; especially in expanding Gregg's (1971) ego-function of protest rhetoric.

Putting RWD and Water Conflict in the Context of Social Movement Literature

It remains to be seen how protests associated with water conflicts of the 21st century will be characterized in the social movement literature. Clearly, water is a site of resistance, and many activists, scholars and even bureaucrats now recognize that water law, at least in the U.S. West, is broken. Water is over-allocated and the policies no longer meet contemporary needs (see e.g., Wilkinson, 1992). Much has been written

about water as "crisis" (see, e.g., Bakker, 2003; Barlow & Clarke, 2002) and water conflicts as water "wars" (see e.g., Shiva, 2002) of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In February of 2011, the University of Utah held a conference on "Water, Conflict and Human Rights" (http://humanrights.utah.edu/forums/2011/videos.php*)*. Keynote speakers Maude Barlow and Peter Gleick, as well as multiple panelists at this conference noted how the water cycle is inextricably linked with climate change phenomena (e.g., melting glaciers, flooding in low elevations, increasing average temperatures, migration of species to higher and cooler elevations, etc.). Rhetoricians are beginning to describe climate change activism as a social movement (e.g., Endres et al*.,* 2009). Since water is a ubiquitous substance that makes life possible, it naturally intersects with a range of social movements such as the environmental, social justice and the more nascent climate change movements. Before elaborating on how RWD participation relates to social movements, it will be helpful to review the relevant definitions of social movement.

Griffin (1952) defined social movement as having two classes of rhetoricians: aggressors and defendants. Cathcart (1972) shifted this definition toward a rhetorical focus on the dialectic formation between status quo and alternatives and restricted defining collective action to rhetorical movement only if the status quo cannot accommodate it. Smith and Windes (1975) critiqued these impulses because they "perceive significant public communication as a grand public debate tournament, where critical interest focuses on the dogmatic pyrotechnics of extremists." "Rhetorical theory" they argued, "must recognize alternative social processes." On these claims, they set forth a theory of innovational movements, which does not require the demanded changes to "disturb the symbols and constraints of existing values or modify the social hierarchy" (p.

84). In other words, Smith and Windes claim that social movement can operate within hegemonic and counterhegemonic contexts. This definition is one that I adopt because it relates to the types of contexts or spaces where coalition participants operate since some participants identify as activists on the one hand and function as members of the status quo (e.g., as decision makers) on the other.

In the RWD, there are participants that identify as environmentalists, peace activists, ranchers, community leaders, natives, scientists, attorneys, teachers, business owners, etc. Thus, discourses from the environmental, social justice, and American Indian movements, as well as hegemonic discourses such as frontier, industrial, and scientific, collide, converge, and weave through group deliberations. Some participants might identify as protestors (or as alternative) whereas others view themselves as part of the status quo (or as mainstream). Smith and Windes' definition of social movements works here because we might think of the heterogeneity of coalition rhetoric as constituted by the confluence of discourses from multiple social movements *and* hegemonic discourses.

Scholars have challenged the traditional view that social movements evolve in three neatly comprised stages of "inception, crisis and consummation" arguing that "tactical modifications" occur to sustain "a movement's public image and influence" (Morris & Browne, 2006, p. 455). Rhetorical approaches to social movements draw on significant ideological terms and emphasize responses to and evolving positions of the rhetoric of social protests. This literature informs my research on the rhetorical strategies of coalitions (RWD) in response to catalytic external events, and the ways in which coalition rhetoric interlocks with broader discourses that may or may not tap into social

movements.

Tactics for Internal Audiences

Beyond definitions of social movements and the positionality of the RWD in present water wars in the western U. S., social movement literature can serve as a heuristic resource for analyzing coalition rhetoric that involves tactics for external audiences (e.g., DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; Endres et al., 2009; Pezzullo, 2003) as well as institutionalized tactics of control (e.g., Morris, 2001; Zarefsky, 1977) and tactical rhetorical modifications (e.g., Darsey, 1991; Railsback, 1984), but as I stated earlier, less attention has been paid to rhetorical tactics for internal audiences. Gregg (1971) describes internal rhetoric intended to encourage group cohesion and belonging as the ego-function of protest rhetoric. As I will describe in more detail in Chapter 4, melodramatic humor used in appropriate *kairotic* moments and directed at external targets is a form of ego-function protest rhetoric that serves coalition unity. Additionally, I expand beyond the ego-function of protest rhetoric in the analysis chapter on humor by identifying four forms of humor that operate within a comic master frame, which my findings suggest is the most appropriate master frame for internal coalition maintenance.

In summary, social movement literature offers valuable resources for understanding rhetorical strategies of coalitions, and my research findings specifically contribute to social protest literature that treats internal rhetoric. This brings up the complex constitutive aspects of individual identities that comprise coalitions.

Participation and Intergroup Communication

Some of the rhetorical strategies that I have identified in internal coalition communication involve identity vulnerability. This is something that I take to be a common source of conflict. Identity vulnerability can occur when cultural tensions and discursive difference are present. In the intergroup communication literature, Hecht, Jackson and Pitts (2005) trace the evolution of identity theories within the context of group communication and claim that this literature is undernourished at the cultural intersections of intergroup communication and identity theories. They treat intergroup communication in terms of complex identities interacting within groups, which is particularly relevant to this project's focus on negotiating cultural tensions, as I have defined them, within coalitions. Hecht's cultural identity theory (CIT) moves beyond dyadic approaches to understand identity as a layered phenomenon that takes into account individuals, roles, social interactions, relations and collectivity. This involves identity construction through internalization (of discourses) and categorization processes that are dynamic. The sense of self emerges in the context of social interaction. Externalization (of discourses) and motivation additionally influence these more fluid processes of identity construction. Thus, CIT helps us understand how layers of identity serve as organizing principles (personal, enactment, relational, and communal) for every day interactions. My findings contribute to CIT by identifying ways that complex and layered identities can negotiate conflict in a communal context.

As I suggested at the beginning of this literature review, I will address additional communication literature that emerged as being specifically relevant in each of the analysis chapters. This includes communication literature that treats humor and conflict,

rhetorical frameworks, conflict models, cooperative argumentation and deliberative communication. Next I will briefly introduce the case study that I am proposing for this dissertation project.

Verdant Valley and the Interbasin Aqueduct Dispute

The old adage, "Whiskey's for drinkin' and water's for fightin'!" provides some insight into why conflict over water is an important site for studying rhetorical strategies in coalition maintenance. To unpack this frontier maxim it is important to understand a few basic facts about water. Water, on planet earth, is contained within a closed system – that is there will never be any more or less water than there is on the planet at present. Water, as a liquid, is a medium that suspends and dissolves various molecular structures as it flows (e.g., plant nutrients in the form of fertilizers). Fresh water (as opposed to ocean water) is a ubiquitous substance that sustains life forms on the earth's crust. There are very few land species that can survive without fresh water for extended periods of time. Potable water (nontoxic fresh or drinking water) is becoming a critical topic on a global scale, particularly within the context of climate change, water privatization trends, human rights and coalition-building initiatives. Simply put, where water is located and what is in water matters. This research project is situated within this macro context as it deals with water provision practices in North America, specifically those in the arid U.S. West, at the close of the first decade of the 21st century. At this time in history, policy-makers and water bureaucrats in the American West, especially those in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California are facing serious water problems associated with natural aridity, drought, energy production, human population

growth and demand, over-allocation of water rights and aging infrastructures for water and sewage provision systems. In other words, scarcity drives a sense of crisis over water, because clean (unpolluted) fresh water is what makes healthy life forms and living systems possible.

The Rural Water Defenders (RWD) organized primarily to prevent the Urban Water District's (UWD) proposal for the interbasin water transfer (via aqueducts) from multiple valleys north of Urbana, to the greater Urbana metropolitan area. This coalition consists of a consortium of interested individuals and affiliates struggling to shut down *all* possibilities for the aqueduct proposal or water grab, as they often reference it, to move forward.

Studying deliberations within the RWD helps me to understand rhetorical strategies for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive difference within environmental controversies. Tensions arise within the coalition due to the presence of plural worldviews, diverse conflict styles among participants and disagreements over what constitutes appropriate external responses to evolving political and social circumstances. This was the case when a two-state compact was proposed by Desert State and Mountain State water-bureaucrats for water allocations in Verdant Valley. Additionally, RWD strategy meetings are facilitated. As I explicate in the analysis chapter on process literacy, the consistent co-facilitation of meetings by skilled participants is an important factor in the successful negotiation of cultural tensions and discursive difference when they arise among these disparate actors. As previously indicated, RWD includes indigenous peoples, peace activists, environmentalists, ranchers, county commissioners, citizens in both urban and rural areas, health communicators, scientists, state and federal

bureaucrats, business owners, and litigators. Remarkably, to date, the RWD has been able to successfully negotiate these cultural tensions and discursive differences when they have arisen. While much of what I have discovered, in analyzing rhetorical strategies that enable and constrain coalition maintenance are mostly enabling strategies, these findings point to best practices, which contribute to the literatures I have delineated in the theoretical framework and literature review sections of this dissertation. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods for this study.

Notes

[4]Coalitions can form among ruling factions in society as a means to maintain hegemonic practices, however this project focuses on a geographically based grassroots coalition that has formed in response to an interbasin aqueduct proposal perceived as a threat by coalition participants to the social and ecological integrity of the rural area targeted by the project.

[5]For an interesting discussion of challenges to democracy presented by changes in scale, complexity and increased information through communication technologies and the relationship between democracy and capitalism in the context of the future of democratic theory, see Dahl (1996). Dahl suggests that democracy can be thought of as an ideal and he refers to "modern representative democracy with universal suffrage" as a "polyarchal democracy" (p. 12).

[6]For example, what is considered a "text" in contemporary rhetorical theory moves well beyond traditional forms of public address. The ideological turn (e.g., see McGee, 1980 & Wander, 1983, 1984) marked the domain of rhetoric as both material and symbolic phenomena (including textual silences) in the public sphere. Soon thereafter, the critical turn in rhetorical theory (e.g., Blair, Brown & Baxter, 1994; McKerrow, 1989; Ono & Sloop, 1992, 1995, 1999) increased awareness and understanding of the presence of oppressive forms of power in discourse, how power circulates/gets (re)produced, and the material effects of power (e.g., Cloud, 1994; Greene 1998).

[7]See Seigel (2004) for an interesting essay on ecological influences in Burke's writings.

[8]I argue elsewhere that the concept of "public" participation needs to be expanded to account for extrahuman voices (see, e.g., Callister, in press).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL HYBRIDITY

I have used a combination of methods: rhetorical criticism augmented by qualitative field methods (i.e., participant observation and semistructured interviews) to examine the rhetorical tactics and strategies for coalition maintenance in light of discursive difference and cultural tensions. Rhetorical criticism allowed me to uncover these rhetorical tactics and strategies. However, because much of what happens in the RWD is not textualized and available to the public, I used qualitative methods of data collection. First, I will describe rhetorical criticism as a method. Then, I will describe the qualitative field methods that I employed to obtain the necessary texts for doing rhetorical analysis.

Rhetorical Criticism

My main method for analysis was rhetorical criticism, in which theory and method are intimately intertwined. Rhetorical criticism is a way to understand persuasion and influence within specific historical contexts among speakers (or rhetors), texts, and audiences. As discussed in the theory section of this prospectus, rhetorical criticism has Aristotelian roots. Contemporary rhetorical criticism follows on the heels of many turns or disruptions in the academy, such as the ideological, interpretive and material turns, and

the development of poststructural, postmodern, and postcolonial scholarship. Contemporary rhetorical criticism takes into account a much broader conception of rhetor, audience, and text within socio-historic contexts than does traditional rhetorical criticism. This is important for my project since I did not just examine pre-existing speeches. I examined speech acts within a controversy with numerous voices, perspectives, and audiences (not all of which have been textualized) in a broad context of activism and political action aimed toward more participatory democratic ends.

An ideological approach to rhetorical criticism guided my thinking about the circulations of power, textual silences, and the socio-political contexts in which the RWD controversy is embedded. This is particularly important because discursive differences and cultural tensions are not always explicit. The ideological approach in rhetorical criticism includes scholarship that focuses on textual silences and unspoken tacit meanings. McGee (1980) defines ideology as political language comprised of slogan-like terms that signify a collective commitment. Ideographs, he asserts, are single–term orientations that are the basic structural elements or building blocks of ideology. In uncovering ideology, McGee suggests that the critic's role is to create contexts, or rhetorically constructed texts – a *bricoleur*, as Charland (1991) calls it - comprised of densely truncated fragments from texts constructed by multiple audiences, not rhetors. For example, when the name "Ken Gordon, " the Director for UWD is uttered in RWD meetings, this name has significant symbolic meaning for the RWD participants. When invoked, this name elicits a host of audience responses, most of which imply that some form of sinister or oppressive power is at work. Fragments of texts uttered in association with the name "Ken Gordon," a politically powerful figure in the aqueduct controversy,

were useful for locating rhetorical tactics and strategies that enable coalition maintenance. Similarly, as I attended to discursive differences and cultural tensions that arose during internal coalition deliberations, understanding that these were linked to ideology facilitated my analysis process.

Rhetorical criticism is an inductive process in which the critic draws from the rhetorical theories that emerge as being relevant to the set of texts. I will explain more about the theories that emerged as salient in my analysis chapters. I set out to analyze the rhetorical strategies that serve coalition maintenance in a major western water dispute. In order to accomplish this task, I needed to move closer to the site where rhetorical strategies emerge and use qualitative field methods to incorporate participant observation and sensorial field notes (Blair, 2001).

Combining Rhetorical Criticism and Qualitative Field Methods

There are a growing number of scholars that have used or advocated for a combination of rhetorical criticism and qualitative field methods (e.g., Blair, 2001; Conquergood, 1992; Middleton, Senda-Cook & Endres, 2011; Pezzullo, 2003, 2007). Middleton et al. (2011) refer to "rhetorical field methods" as "methods focus[ed] on the processual forms of rhetorical action that are accessible only through participatory methods (and that are flattened when those forms of rhetorical action are reduced to exclusively textual representations" (p.387). This project adopts rhetorical field methods using a combination of participant observation and interviews for collecting texts to conduct rhetorical analysis. I pulled from two primary research loci appropriate for studying the rhetorical dynamics of coalition maintenance within the context of a major

environmental controversy: 1) coalition strategy meetings; and 2) semistructured interviews. This departs from a more traditional, extended ethnographic immersion of a researcher within a cultural community, although the meetings that I have been attending do span three and a half years. Furthermore, I have had an opportunity to attend most of social gatherings the night before each of these eight meetings, which informed my understandings regarding relational dynamics among coalition participants and helped me to build rapport and develop various levels of trust with individuals within the core group of coalition participants who regularly attend the large group strategy sessions.

As a rhetorical critic I have acted as a *bricoleur* (Charland, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; McGee, 1990), cobbling together textual fragments from my field research to form a constructed argument based on evidence and examples that are representative of patterns, phenomena, and material effects in answer to my research questions. Thus, I have come to some understandings in answer to my research questions from close reading of these various sets of texts. And I have constructed arguments to represent these findings using fragments of texts to demonstrate the phenomenon that I have chosen to describe and interpret. Arguments for the persuasive elements of this dissertation are prescriptive treatments that once again, are best constructed by combining textual fragments. This is because a unique combination and juxtaposition of textual fragments is what constitutes rhetoric. For example, in Chapter 5, I cobble together a diverse array of truncated fragments from across theoretical domains that enable me to construct a communication model for process literacy, and to prescribe best practices for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive difference in coalition maintenance.

Background Research

To attain and maintain a grasp on the complexity of this water dispute, I have tracked it for roughly 3 1/2 years. In addition to my formal participant observation and interviewing (described in more detail below), my immersion in this controversy constitutes necessary background research that informs my understanding of the case and my analysis. I attended five public water meetings/hearings relevant to the proposed interbasin aqueduct proposal in three different cities and two different states. Dozens of speakers spoke at these formal gatherings. The majority of speakers were opposed to the UWD proposal to build an aqueduct as well as the proposed two-state compact between Mountain State and UWD for water allocation in Verdant Valley. However, the Urbana hearing included both pro and con advocates, which helped me to better understand the aqueduct dispute from disparate perspectives. Speakers at all of the hearings included RWD participants, interested citizens from both rural and urban sectors, a range of primary stakeholders and governmental representatives. I also attended three governmental citizen advisory meetings.

Additional texts that I reviewed for background information include: regional newspaper opinion editorials, especially those written by RWD participants; RWD newsletters posted on the RWD website; and three audio/video streamed recordings of governmental aqueduct specific advisory meetings held in Mountain State between late 2009 and early 2010. This served as important background information for me to understand the context in which the RWD internal coalition communication takes place.

In addition to these texts that gave me a sense of the context in which RWD functions, I also collected internal texts to better understand the internal workings of the

coalition. I monitored primarily coalition participant authored emails, especially those that appeared to be written to influence readership of the RWD list-serve. Often, a RWD participant will select a text to share among readers and (s)he will include an editorial comment along with the forwarded document or document link (e.g., to a newspaper or magazine article, or to a recent study). I read and tracked these emails on the list-serve from October of 2009 to December 2012, with 397 of these identified as "in-group" emails. After the February 2011 meeting in Urbana, I began receiving internal emails from the RWD coordinators. These emails go to a smaller, more active core group of participants and they primarily notify participants of upcoming meetings, solicit input for the agenda, and list follow-up tasks required by participants to advance coalition goals. I have considerably fewer of these texts (e.g., 32 between February 2011 and November 2012), but these emails enabled me to understand more about the coordination and logistics of coalition activities in between the RWD meetings. In sum, I conducted extensive background research for a better understanding of the context within which internal coalition communication in RWD takes place.

Gathering Nontraditional Texts

I collected my primary texts using the following qualitative field research methods: participant observation and interviews. Gathering texts in the field extends beyond traditional rhetorical texts (such as speeches and media representations); witnessing coalition participants as they negotiated tensions in strategy meetings afforded me access to "live" rhetorics and vernacular voices within coalition deliberations (Middleton et al., 2011, p. 387). Moreover, secondary accounts of these interactions, such

as those that RWD participants discussed with me in interviews, could not offer first hand sensorial audience assessments (e.g., Blair, 2001; Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Pezzullo, 2007). I had to take great care, however, not to do any harm because RWD participants view this current water dispute as a series of battles in an on-going war. They stand much to lose if I am not sensitive to their interests and concerns as I analyze strategies for negotiating internal conflict and for maintaining this coalition.

Toward that end, I adopt Flinder's idea of *relational ethics* and *ecological views* that attend to my responsibilities and the potential consequences within the entire environment in making public what I have learned (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 289-290). Since I am focused on communicative processes, I have negotiated an agreement with RWD not to reveal sensitive substantive aspects of their deliberations. I have conducted face-to-face member checks with RWD volunteers (one large group, two small group and one one-on-one with an RWD attorney). I have also conducted a series of rounds of member checks by email. Each of the direct quotes have been cleared by the individual rhetors and each section of this dissertation has been screened for necessary changes to protect identities and confidential information by a voluntary RWD member check team, including one of RWD's legal counsel. Now, I will elaborate on the two field methods that I utilized: participant observation and semistructured interviews.[9]

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a method for doing field research that calls for reflexive analysis (i.e., "accounting for the researcher's own role in social action" with an awareness of "different orders of reality in a scene") and it enables the researcher to

understand aspects of meaning making practices by being there (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.16). I did participant observation at a series of public water meetings associated with the aqueduct dispute (described above), in two RWD conference calls during the springs of 2011 and 2012, and in eight RWD strategy meetings. The strategy meetings were approximately, 8 hours long. Five of these were held in Verdant Valley, two were held in Urbana, and one was held in a home near the Mountain and Desert state border. From these meetings I made roughly 143 pages of field notes (an average of 18 pages of field notes per 8-hour meeting) during the fall of 2009, the winter, spring, summer and fall of 2010, the winter of 2011, and the winter and summer of 2012. In between doing participant observation at these venues, I took several hours of headnotes, often using a digital audio recorder before and after the meetings while driving in the car or on breaks in my motel room during meetings.

Participant observation entails a range of roles for the researcher in the field. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe four adapting roles: (1) complete participation, (2) participant-as-observer, (3) observer-as-participant, and (4) complete observer. I will discuss roles two and three, because they relate to the way in which my research role evolved during this project.

The observer-as-participant role is one in which participants are aware of the researcher, but participation by the researcher is limited and the emphasis is on observation. In non-public contexts, the limited role of participation by the researcher can be negotiated between the researcher and a trusted group sponsor (or gatekeeper). This role involves “special status”- usually a part-time, temporary, voluntary, and/or “play”

role. This is the role that I initially took on at the RWD strategy meetings, but eventually my role evolved to participant-as-observer.

At the first RWD meeting, my gatekeeper introduced me as a researcher from the University of Utah and allowed me to elaborate by introducing myself. I did so and further explained that I was researching communicative challenges associated with the water dispute and assured the participants that I understood the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of their discussions and that the substance of these meetings were of interest to me for background information.

In subsequent conversations with my doctoral committee chair, we discussed the value of using these field notes for analysis because they are particularly useful in understanding the rhetorical tactics and strategies of internal coalition communication. In the next meeting I asked for time to request the groups' permission to use field notes from these meetings for analysis. Of course, I needed to explain to the group more about my focus on the communicative challenges of coalition maintenance. I made it known that I did not need an immediate decision and reassured the group that I would continue to operate under our initial agreement (that the notes would only be used for background knowledge, but this changed as I will describe next).

I continued to come to the meetings and to field occasional queries from the group about my research interests over time. While a number of RWD board members were initially quite concerned about the use of the notes for analysis, I was eventually able to secure permission to use these notes for analysis via an email from a staff member with board consent (the legal decision-making body for the organization). In short, RWD granted me permission to analyze my field notes so long as I did not attribute quotes to

specific individuals without each person's expressed permission and as long as I did not reveal any sensitive strategies or substantive content that could undermine the coalition.

Since that time, I have been able to develop more trust with participants, and I have occasionally taken on part-time roles beyond that of being present to observe. This happened after I made it explicit that I am empathetic to the RWD's efforts to stop the proposed aqueduct. My decision to make my affinity with RWD's mission explicit rested on much forethought about notions of objectivity in traditional researcher stances. Since the purpose of my research was to learn about rhetorical strategies of internal coalition communication, and not to evaluate the merits of the aqueduct proposal, I decided that being transparent with RWD participants about my affinity with their cause would help me to build trust with the group. In hindsight, I believe that it did. Thus, my role as researcher evolved with a shift of emphasis from observer-as-participant to participant-as-observer.

This fits with Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) recommendation that researchers "should…seek to gradually become useful (in some way) as time goes on, so as to be included in increasingly complex or interesting areas of social life" (p.147). Some examples of increased opportunities for inclusion that I have experienced through building and maintaining trust with RWD participants are: (1) getting included on the trusted email roster, which has enabled me to read communication among RWD participants about tactics and strategies between quarterly meetings, rather than just being able to read posts to the broader list-serve; (2) being asked to facilitate consultation on how to communicate with younger audiences using social media; (3) making connections with resources for grant-writing purposes; (4) having the opportunity to gather at socials

and eat meals with key staff, consultants and board members; (5) responding to requests by RWD participants that wanted to participate at an aforementioned University of Utah water conference; and (6) sharing a room with an RWD Desert State coordinator to defray costs at one of the RWD Urbana meetings. In summary, my role as a participant observer evolved from primarily being present as an observer to more engaged roles including offering, on occasion, relevant information at the quarterly meetings, and answering questions that occasionally solicited my ideas and suggestions at RWD strategy meetings. It also evolved from being perceived as an objective researcher (or possible mole – something I will elaborate more on in the chapter on humor) to being perceived by most of the RWD core group as an ally.

The RWD strategy meetings have been of great value to my research, not only because they inform my overarching research question by revealing rhetorical patterns that emerge around cultural tensions and discursive difference within coalition communication, but also because they helped me to figure out who I wanted to interview. I identified interviewees based on participant observation and my field notes from seven of the eight RWD strategy meetings that I attended. My experience in the field helped me to develop well-formed interview questions (see Appendix A) and the selection of interviewees that were best positioned to inform answers to my research questions. I will describe the semistructured interviews that I conducted next.

Semistructured Informational Interviews

Interviews are purposeful interactions, involving at least two parties and the asking and answering of questions. Informational interviews include information-seeking,

-giving, and -sharing in an exchange between or among participants. Interviews can have more or less structure to them (a predetermined arrangement of the parts). I used semistructured informational interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The purpose of these semistructured informational interviews was to gather information about rhetorical tactics and strategies that I would not otherwise be able to access through traditional texts or participant observation. While I could observe moments of cultural tensions and discursive difference at the strategy meetings, I am not privy to individual feelings or insights regarding these moments. Awareness of hegemonic and alternative discourses along with non-verbal cues among participants can help me understand when these phenomena occur, but I posited that I could learn more about what constrains or enables communication climates when cultural tensions and discursive difference arise within coalition communication in one-on-one conversations with key participants that have engaged in the RWD for years. This certainly proved to be so. Additionally, traveling to four of the informants' homes enabled me to better understand their worldviews. For example, I took time to travel to, visit with, and interview an indigenous RWD participant where he and a number of his tribal relations have lived for millennia. He toured me for an hour through some of these homelands and fresh water springs that are sacred to him and his tribe before returning to his home to do an interview. I had previously witnessed the ways in which his native interests were marginalized and silenced in governmental advisory meetings, and made note of these cultural tensions and traditional hierarchical governmental practices in contrast to the more egalitarian participation practices of RWD participants.

I chose to interview (and record with permission from every participant) 2 coordinators (from Desert and Mountain states), 2 board members, 2 consultants, and 5 key participants. This collection of participants included backgrounds ranging from peace activists, to environmentalists, to business owners, to indigenous perspectives, and to ranchers.[10] I interviewed 4 women and 7 men. Three of the informants are Native Americans. Each informant is a former or current (and regular) participant in the strategy meetings. Most interviews lasted from 1 to 2 hours depending on the length of the individual answers and the degree to which I was directive with my questions, but one phone interview went over 3 hours and it was conducted in two sessions several days apart. Additionally, participants in the RWD meetings had known for over 1 year that I might be asking them for an interview. Out of the 11 informants, 4 volunteered.

Each interview had an opening to establish the purpose, seek informed consent, and to build rapport, a body, in which I moved through a series of predetermined questions with enough flexibility to skip over or rearrange the questions to keep the flow of the interview as smooth as possible, and a closing to allow informants to ask questions, to thank them and to ask permission to follow up by phone or email if I had any further questions. I strove for self-reflexivity in these interviews much like I have described in the latter section. I could tell when I needed to skip over some questions or speed up the pace of the interview in some cases, but somehow missed the cues in at least one instance. For example, one informant, while crediting me for spurring along her thinking regarding coalition durability and development concerns, simultaneously chastised me for the length of the interview during the subsequent RWD strategy session. Thus, if I had these interviews to do over again, I would have asked fewer questions and checked in

with my informants more often to demonstrate my appreciation and respect for their time. Additionally, I tried to have an awareness of power dynamics, especially since I was guiding the direction of the interviews and had reluctant participants due to the sensitivity of my inquiries about conflict situations (e.g., Kellett & Dalton, 2001; Powell & Amsbary, 2006; Stewart & Cash, 2006). In general, this self-reflexivity served my interview goals well, although I was more successful with some informants than I was with others on the topic of conflict. This may have been, in part, due to individual conflict orientations and comfort levels with the topic.

I drafted open-ended questions beginning with words such as "what," "where," "when," and "how" (see the Appendix). These questions explored participant backgrounds in coalition initiatives; internal coalition communication patterns; challenges in internal and external coalition communication; opinions about conflicts and decision-making practices within the group; strategies that have worked to ease tensions as conflicts had arisen among participants; and strategies to sway broader audiences and decision-makers.[11] With an eye toward cross-cultural representation, I approached individuals who were directly involved in a major disagreement over a two-state compact (which I describe in more detail in Chapter 5) or that I surmised were most likely to inform my research questions. With each informant, I first secured verbal or written consent to do the interview. I emailed (or gave) each informant an IRB consent document to read and review in advance of each of these interviews and offered them each an opportunity to ask me questions about the process before each interview. When I met with each of the interviewees, I reviewed the consent form and confirmed that each was participating voluntarily, without the requirement to answer any or all of the questions,

before receiving the signed document from each person. None of the informants expressed concern about these aspects of the process, and no one had any pressing questions. I identified a date and time that would work with each informant's schedule, and I traveled to the cities where these informants were located (three cities in urban sectors of both Mountain and Desert states and two towns in rural areas of both Mountain and Desert states). The texts that I gathered were comprised of digital audio recordings of interviews with 11 RWD participants. During each interview, I took varying amounts of scratch notes, marking specific interview questions with noteworthy content (e.g., signifiers) and time of day. Later, I listened to each of these interviews several times and fleshed out my notes with regard to highly relevant excerpts relating to the negotiation of cultural tensions and discursive differences within RWD. I then transcribed key sections of each of these interviews to create digital word texts for close textual reading and analysis.

These face to face, semistructured informational interviews encouraged participants to discuss more freely differences that had arisen and had been negotiated within the RWD. While in the majority of the interviews I asked most of the questions found in the Appendix, I focused my analysis for this dissertation on informant responses to questions one through 15 and question 25, since these questions focused primarily on internal coalition communication. I anticipated that these texts would mostly inform answers to RQ1: What are the rhetorical tactics and strategies that respond to cultural tensions and discursive differences within coalitions and do they enable or constrain the ability to negotiate these differences? However, I found that the interviews also informed RQ2: What are the rhetorical tactics and strategies of (dis)engagement and

(non)participation in *maintaining* coalitions, especially those used for internal coalition audiences? In particular, I learned about some of the histories relating to (dis)engagement and (non)participation that preceded my entry into the research site.

In sum, I used rhetorical field methods to collect texts that I then rhetorically analyzed. When conducting my field research, I followed the conventions of qualitative research regarding methodologically rigorous collection of data. When I analyzed the texts using contemporary rhetorical criticism, I used the conventions of rhetorical criticism (close textual reading informed by contemporary rhetorical theory) to ensure a rigorous analysis of these texts. Using these research methods, I was able to derive understandings about the tactics and strategies of coalition maintenance in light of negotiating cultural tensions and discursive difference during conflict. Through this process, I discovered that the comic frame is an appropriate master frame for internal coalition communication because it serves coalition maintenance. Additionally, I discovered that aptly delivered humor and process literacy are fundamental rhetorical strategies in negotiating discursive difference and cultural tensions that inevitably arise in internal coalition decision-making. Thus, humor (used in *kairotic* moments) and process literacy are important rhetorical strategies in coalition maintenance.

Reflection

I only recommend this kind of research for scholars that are passionate about a coalition's cause. One does not need to become a complete participant, but trust issues are paramount to being able to witness deliberative sessions within coalition strategy meetings. There is much at stake in coalition work and I am grateful that I had an

opportunity to be a participant observer, and that I was granted permission to use my field notes. Member checks are critical to this process and they can be very time-consuming. Member checks, while ethically imperative, extend well beyond the researcher's work in the field to gather texts. At this writing, I am still conducting member checks and I am trying to keep a sense of humor about it.

Notes

[9]Initially I received an IRB waiver for public water meetings where I have been a participant observer. Later, I successfully secured IRB approval to retroactively use my RWD quarterly meeting field notes for analysis and for doing future face-to-face semistructured interviews.

[10] It is important to remember that the findings in this case study cannot be generalized. The demographic mix of these informants does not include any governmental representatives. This creates an additional limitation with regard to implications this study has for deliberative contexts external to coalition communication, e.g., within governmental agency decision-making contexts. However, my participant observation did include governmental representation at local and distal levels.

[11]I explored a community-based research component to these interviews by asking several RWD coordinators if I might ask a small set of additional research questions on behalf of RWD, but the idea seemed to create confusion and it did not spark any ideas or expressed interest from these gatekeepers.

CHAPTER 4

HUMOR AS A RHETORICAL STRATEGY

"Blessed are we who can laugh at ourselves for we shall never cease to be amused."
Anonymous

In his book, *Attitudes toward History*, Burke (1959) describes traditional poetic categories in western culture and introduces the comic frame (or corrective) as a broad approach to social criticism that accepts misguided motives and presumes reform is plausible. He summarizes, "When you lump the lot [of literary frames], discounting each poetic category according to its nature, they seem to add up nearest to comedy. Which might be a roundabout way of saying: whatever poetry may be, criticism had best be comic" (p. 107). In this chapter, I argue that suitable humor, within a predominately comic frame, is a rhetorical strategy that contributes to releasing tension and moving internal coalition communication toward collaborative and productive realms.

I offer a case study that highlights: 1) how humor is used within a comic frame; and 2) how the forms and functions of humor can productively shift into a melodramatic frame at certain *kairotic* moments without disrupting the function of comic humor. The delivery of comedic humor and melodramatic humor, while seemingly mutually exclusive, can coexist in internal coalition rhetoric not only because of appropriate timing but also because these forms of humor are directed at different audiences: comedic humor

is directed at internal coalition participants and melodramatic humor is directed externally. I will show that both comedic humor and melodramatic humor, when used at the appropriate time and directed toward the appropriate audience, can serve coalition maintenance.

These findings provide several important insights for communication scholarship. First, these findings highlight the importance of strategic selection of frames for motivating (individuals and collectives within) publics and addressing contemporary environmental crises (Cox, 2007). Second, I aim to extend social movement literature that addresses rhetorical strategies within comic and melodramatic frames by analyzing four forms of humor as rhetorical strategies of coalition maintenance within the context of an environmental social movement campaign. Finally, humor is largely overlooked in contemporary rhetorical criticism that treats the comic frame with the exception of Powell's (1995) correct distinction of comedy from Burke's concept of a comic frame and Carlson's (1988) finding that literary humor was limited in its ability to (re)define 19th century women's values. My findings contribute to this scant literature on rhetorical humor by suggesting that humor is a rhetorical strategy in coalition communication and a significant tool for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences that are inherent in coalitions.

In this chapter, I review relevant literature that treats the comic and melodramatic rhetorical frames and argue that the treatment of humor within these frames needs more attention. Then, I identify, describe and analyze four forms of humor as rhetorical strategies that release tension and promote collaboration within the context of internal coalition communication. Additionally, I demonstrate how antithetical rhetorical

frameworks can function side by side if care is taken to respect insider/outsider and individual/collective boundaries. Moreover, I explicate how humor, used appropriately within predominantly comic, but occasionally melodramatic frames functions as a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance. Finally, I discuss implications for scholarship focused at the nexus of social movements, conflict studies and democracy.

The Comic Frame

Recall from the discussion in the introduction that a comic frame, as Burke (1959) describes it, is a "charitable" frame of acceptance that eschews violence and promotes unity or peaceful ways to address social problems without being "gullible" or overly trusting of others (p.107). The motive in a comic frame is to heighten awareness of the underlying societal pressures that converge to create complex issues, and to identify and learn from mistakes so as to prevent them from recurring.[12] A comic frame entails a dialectic approach to problems: within every positive attribute there lies a negative one. It holds open a space for careful consideration of diverse perspectives without abandoning the ability to think critically about these perspectives. In this way, a comic frame is benevolent but not credulous. In a comic frame, there is room for critique and criticism without the tendency to totalize or villainize those who embody, represent or practice opposing principles. There is room for listening, learning, making mistakes, learning from mistakes, and there is room for ambivalence toward one's own and others' actions without the requirement for dissociation. A comic frame acknowledges and engages dissonance and discord without acting on the impulse to splinter. For Burke, the comic frame is "the methodic view of human antics as a comedy, albeit as a comedy ever on the

verge of the most disastrous tragedy" (p. xiii). Powell (1995) interprets Burke's motive behind offering the comic frame as "the only hope" for constructing "a society that won't eventually self-destruct" (p. 97).[13] Perhaps Powell's interpretation is correct, however the point I wish to emphasize is that a comic frame requires a sense of humility. A humble viewpoint recognizes the fallibility of the viewer; to be human is to err. In short, the motive in a comic frame, or the attitude of being charitable toward others who embody and enact opposing principles, stops short of opportunism (or selling out as a means of remaining in a relationship with opponents) and it refrains from denigrating the character of opponents. In this way the comic frame is antithetical to melodrama.

The question remains, what can be gained in shifting from a comic to a melodramatic frame if and when the status quo is not willing to recognize the existence of major problems in the first place? This is the crux of recent scholarly discussions over the *kairos* of rhetorical frames chosen by rhetors striving to call attention to large-scale anthropogenic problems such as climate change (Kinsella et al., 2008). Put another way, is the comic frame (in)capable of gaining enough traction to motivate publics to do what is needed to stave off threats to the carrying capacities of ecological systems that sustain life on earth? In an attempt to grapple with this question, I turn to the melodramatic frame.

The Melodramatic Frame

Schwarze (2006) recommends studying how certain frames become master frames. In Kinsella et al. (2008), Schwarze also suggests studying the interactions between competing "environmental melodramas" and the dynamic interactions between

melodrama and other rhetorical strategies (p.104). My findings from this case study respond to this recommendation and suggest that the comic frame is a master frame that is most appropriate for internal coalition communication, but that this frame does not preclude shifting to a more narrowly focused and productive melodramatic frame in delimited ways.

Melodrama is constituted by polemic rhetorical appeals. Check explains in Kinsella et al. (2008), that a melodramatic frame creates irreparable evil villains or "devils" and forecloses all options for saving face (p. 93). Schwarze, in Kinsella et al. (2008) suggests that Check illuminates the "transformative potential" of melodrama by demonstrating that a "rhetorical devil" must articulate with broader moral and political issues in order to resonate among publics (p. 103). Additionally, Schwarze (2006) argues that "the integrative action of comedy may be less appropriate than melodrama's dynamics of division" in certain instances (p. 242). He asserts that the melodramatic frame:

> can transform ambiguous and unrecognized environmental conditions into public problems; it can call attention to how distorted notions of the public interest conceal environmental degradation; and, it can overcome public indifference to environmental problems by amplifying their moral and emotional dimensions. (pp. 239-240)

In other words, if particular practices can be linked to immorality, audience members that identify as "moral" may change practices and dissociate from individuals and collectives that enact or enable such practices.

Divisive actions certainly can exist within both comic and melodramatic frames, but it is in the attitudes toward these divisions that they differ. A comic frame assumes that perpetrators can be purified, redeemed and reabsorbed in improved social orderings,

whereas melodramatic frames hold little hope for purification and redemption without sacrificial scapegoats (Kinsella et al., 2008).

Divisions created through melodrama are especially important to consider in internal coalition communication because of the diversity of cultural viewpoints that constitute coalitions and the potential for fissures along these lines of diversity that can weaken the fragile and collective bonds that hold coalitions together. Not all of the participants in the Rural Water Defenders (RWD)[14] coalition, for example, identify as environmentalists, however they all identify as aqueduct opponents. They are united in their collective opposition to a particular threat, not in their individual identities. The potential to splinter along these lines of individual identities is ever-present. Given the review of comic and melodramatic frames, above, a comic frame would encourage unity and a melodramatic frame would promulgate the potential for splintering. A melodramatic frame is not as charitable as a comic frame. It does not refrain from attacking identities and public chastisement.

The presence of a master comic frame for RWD's internal coalition communication speaks to the significant diversity that constitutes this coalition and the compelling need to hail historic opponents as allies so as to maintain a united front against the proposed water aqueduct. In other words, a comic frame is necessary for purposes of maintaining and sustaining coalitional activities. As we will see in subsequent sections that treat coalition humor in this chapter, comic humor is primarily used for internal coalition audiences, while melodramatic humor usually is reserved for targets external to the coalition. I will expound on this in subsequent sections of this chapter, but first I will briefly discuss the function of humor within these two frames.

The Function of Humor within Comic and Melodramatic Frames

I argue that humor within a comic frame functions to help audience members see how others might come to view something from a particular (and alien) perspective – a useful lens for diverse collectives. On the other hand, humor within a melodramatic frame functions to help audience members feel a sense of solidarity in their moral indignation over dominant practices that conceal oppressive expressions of power and its material effects. Frame selection, then, turns on this insider/outsider dyad, because while a melodramatic frame directed at participants inside the coalition can undermine trust and strain relationships, melodramatic humor directed at outsiders can bolster a sense of self in solidarity with others against evildoers. Next, I will briefly review the scholarship that treats humor and conflict.

Humor and Conflict

Little, if any, scholarship deals specifically with humor[15] and internal coalition communication within the context of environmental conflicts.[16] Studies about humor and conflict, however, appear across a range of disciplines. Organizational communication scholars, in particular, have explored the topic of humor in the workplace (Dogherty, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2004; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006), but none of these studies have looked at humor in the context of a loosely held organization within a relatively flattened hierarchy such as the RWD coalition.[17] Beyond the subdiscipline of organizational communication, linguistics scholars identify humor as a tool for mitigating conflict, and describe characteristic strategies for constructing humor through conflict talk (Norrick & Spitz, 2008, 2010). Rhetorical theorist, Myer (2000) describes

convergent and divergent enactments of humor and the paradoxes associated with rhetorical applications of the same. I contribute to this rather scant body of communication literature that treats humor by demonstrating how the practice of using various forms of humor in internal coalition communication can: (1) function to maintain open communication toward productive and collaborative realms; (2) shift back and forth between a predominantly comic frame and a delimited melodramatic frame; and (3) function as a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance.

Humor in Internal Coalition Communication

Participants in the RWD are always wary of the potential for someone among the group to "cash in." For example, the Urban Water District (UWD) has offered tens of millions of dollars for the sale of certain ranchlands in rural Desert State and they now own an alignment of key ranches in the rural basins targeted by the large interbasin water transfer project (DC1, 10/16/11). In face-to-face situations, RWD coalition participants often remind each other of such stark realities through the use of humor. In addition to the risk of participants cashing in, there are often references made to "moles" (i.e., spies). I learned this upon entering the scene because I was instantly hailed as a suspicious character. While I would say that I have made substantial progress in allaying most of the qualms about my intentions as a participant observer, I would guess that I have not put all of the RWD participants' concerns to rest. Perhaps my interest in RWD humor was stirred due to feeling marginalized the first time the group made jokes about moles. On the other hand, I enjoy humor, especially humor that is not directed at my expense, yet I am finding that I can still appreciate it even if it is. Nevertheless, over the 2 1/2 to 3 years

of field research with the RWD, I have come to appreciate the ways in which the group uses spontaneous humor in internal coalition communication. As one of RWD's attorneys, Ian, remarked, "I do think humor is a real hallmark of this group of people…it has probably been a key thing in terms of managing and controlling sort of negative or potentially negative issues or developments" (DC9, 11/23/11).[18]

In the RWD strategy meetings, participants vary the rhetorical frame of their humor between comedy and melodrama according to whether the target is an ally or an opponent. Comedic humor is the prevailing form of humor that targets allies and social structures; however, melodramatic humor gets reserved for opponents that symbolize greed and other forms of evil. As I will argue, humor is an indicator of and a vital component for maintaining an open communication climate within RWD's strategic meetings, which requires collective stamina to deliberate agreements on strategies to derail the interbasin transfer project. I have identified four forms of humor that recur in the RWD meetings.

The first form is "lighthearted humor," which includes playful forms of humor like witty remarks, whimsical utterances, silly puns, and simple joking around about the work at hand. I argue that lighthearted humor helps to release tensions and free up energy to sustain long work sessions. This form of humor operates within the comic frame internally targeted to coalition participants.

"Self deprecating humor" is the second form, which includes various ways of making fun of one's own foibles or idiosyncrasies. I argue that self-deprecating humor is a sign of and contributes to an open communication climate (Wood, 2008) that invites careful listening without egoistic impediments (Tolle, 2005) and a collaborative

orientation (Kellett & Dalton, 2001). Again, this form of humor targets internal coalition participants and operates within the comic frame.

The third form of humor also uses the comic frame and it, too, is directed internally. This form of humor is "satire and irony." I group these two forms of humor together because they identify and function to critique the stupidity of underlying problems within social systems and complicit practices on the precipice of disaster (e.g., the potential risks of ignoring climate change data).

"Humor at the expense of others" is the fourth form of humor. It entails making fun of others in such a way that audiences laugh *at* these others, not *with* them. Interestingly, I have found that this form of humor gets delivered within both the comic and the melodramatic frame depending on the particular situation. Melodramatic humor at the expense of others is typically directed at antagonists who signify problems within the political, scientific and legal systems that drive water policy in the region. When directed outside of the coalition, at those or that which symbolically represents the opposition, humor at the expense of others contributes to the construction of a sense of self in solidarity with the collective of aqueduct protestants (or rural water defenders). This is in line with what Gregg (1971) calls the ego-function of protest rhetoric. This form of humor is typically reserved for coalition opponents and it happens within a melodramatic frame. A gentler form of humor at the expense of others can be directed internally toward coalition participants, but in this more generous form, it is utilized within a comic frame as a form of teasing, as a comic corrective (e.g., a face-saving way to mark a particular behavior) or as a comedic expression of endearment.

These four forms of humor function as rhetorical strategies of coalition maintenance. Because they recur throughout the RWD strategy meetings and get practiced by RWD participants over time, I assert, that humor is a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance.

Lighthearted Humor

There are physical constraints to being an active participant in the RWD. Many of the participants travel long distances in order to attend face-to-face strategy meetings. Sitting for long periods of time can make it challenging to maintain energy and enthusiasm for the work. Mental acuity is paramount to achieving aggressive agenda goals and "battle" fatigue can, at times, diminish engagement levels among participants during these deliberative sessions. A sense of hopelessness could overwhelm these self-described "stalwarts" (DC6, 4/2/11). For example, Joe explains a couple of the significant political and structural challenges of the situation: "Patrick Quinnert has pushed this aqueduct forth. It would not have gotten nearly as far as it did. Who dares come out against Patrick Quinnert and him wanting the aqueduct? Nobody with any power in Urbana" (DC1). And Ian explains some of the material constraints facing the group: "This year, I am sorry to say, that it looks as though we may be looking at many hours of attorney time that will be totally unpaid for" (DC9, 11/15/11). But lighthearted humor helps to stave off a sense of despair that could result from these realities. As I stated above, lighthearted humor is playful. It includes witty remarks, whimsical utterances, silly jokes, and jovial attitudes toward the work at hand. During RWD's strategic

meetings, this form of humor functions to keep people laughing, release tensions and free up energy to sustain group deliberations and actions.

Dave explained this function of lighthearted humor in an interview:

> You know we have got to keep that, um, lighthearted perspective on it because otherwise it's just too depressing. Ah, this is a looonng fight [that] we are into, here. It's a difficult one - even a desperate one in some respects. There is a lot at stake [2-second pause]. Soooo, you know, hey, keeping a sense of humor is pretty crucial to staying sane and staying on task with one another. We like to have fun, and we like to try to keep it light. (DC5, 10/18/11)

Thus, Dave implies that lighthearted humor helps save the group from desperation and from losing a sense of sanity against all odds. He also points out that this form of humor functions to keep the participants "on task with one another." In moments when individuals use lighthearted humor, I do not mean to imply that these are conscious tactics to breathe energy into these strenuously long meetings. Rather, humor happens spontaneously. Jamie, remarked, "It's not like we just sit there and think to ourselves, 'Oh, I'll use humor… now,' like we have [game show] buttons in front of ourselves. We just do it!" (personal conversation, 2/27/10).

Nevertheless, in the context of these RWD meetings, lighthearted humor is a rhetorical strategy that serves to help enliven the discussions and bring renewed energy to the communicative interactions and the work at hand. This function of lighthearted humor fits within Myer's (2000) argument that forms of humor can unite groups. More specifically, I argue that lighthearted humor helps make the painstaking collective work to defeat the aqueduct proposal playful and fun. First, I will offer several examples from various meetings to provide evidence of lighthearted humor across RWD meetings. Then, to delve deeper into lighthearted humor, I will focus my analysis on a series of examples

that took place within one afternoon strategy session in order to demonstrate relationships between light hearted humor and group mood/communication climate.

Laughter precipitated by lighthearted humor, is common as RWD participants gather together before the meeting officially gets underway. For example, at a meeting in Urbana, recently, there were only a few open seats around the table as I entered the meeting room. I gravitated toward the end where several seats remained and Ruby remarked, "Are you going to join us?" I responded, "Yes, but I'm not sure I want to sit at the head of the table." Ruby quipped, "Last I checked it was the heel!" and Ian, who was standing behind me added, "What does that make me, the bunion?" And those of us within earshot shared a laugh with Ruby and Ian over their jovial remarks (02/13/12). Another example of this form of lighthearted humor happened during a summer meeting. Dave had remarked that UWD was like a headless chicken that was still running around, because it didn't know that it was dead yet. Then Rita called on Appu. He held up his thumb and whimsically uttered, "I'm just confirming that my thumb is still connected to my toe." A short burst of laughter filled the room (07/26/10). These are two brief examples of lighthearted humor as a form of playful fun that occurs during the RWD strategy meetings. This lighthearted form of humor often functions to energize the mood in the room after hours of collective strategy work.

Now, I will focus on one extended example to show the relationship between lighthearted humor and coalition communication climate. Afternoon sessions of daylong RWD coalition meetings can present challenges due to participant fatigue. One afternoon, during a meeting in April, the group was suffering from low energy (04/02/11). Rita reflected on the lack of energy in the room, "We're in a post lunch slump," and then she

added, “Well *all* afternoon is post lunch.” At this point she sat down, which is unusual for her, because she generally stands to facilitate the meetings. Participants in the room were intermittently yawning and a couple of participants had their eyes closed. A discussion followed about coordinating with other groups that could line up on RWD’s side at the Desert State Engineer’s (DSE’s) water hearings. Rita then turned to Dave and began to say, “You have,” but no words followed. Dave said, “I have?” and Lily interjected, “Caffeine?” Dave laughed and continued to speak. He told the group that RWD needed to do a press release to inform the public of the opportunity to protest UWD applications for water rights in the rural basins targeted by the project. The next agenda item read: “Native American issues.” Shortly thereafter, Mary returned to the room and apologized for her absence because it had been her turn to speak. “I was sleepy,” she said, “so I went for a walk.” These examples illustrate the rather lethargic mood in the RWD strategy session.

Within this context of a sluggish afternoon session, the RWD strategy session encountered a particularly tense topic of conversation. Rita led a discussion aimed at identifying experts that could provide criticism on the interbasin water transfer project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that was scheduled for release soon. Participation was somewhat flat as evidenced by few hands in the air, however, Tony offered mapping resources through his organizational affiliate and asked the group what kind of maps they might need as visual aids. Ian suggested that maps demonstrating environmental impacts associated with the proposed aqueduct project would be helpful. Another participant responded, “What is not environmental? It’s the whole kit and caboodle!” Pushing for more specificity, Rita remarked, “We need to do this *now*; there is

not a future meeting in time to address these issues, although it *is* hard to map dust storms." Ian interjected, "I disagree. We can super impose air trajectories onto land. There are at least ten experts we could get for this." Rita pushed again for specificity. She repeated, "*Now* is the time to do this." The tension in the room was almost palpable.

It was in this context of low energy and tension that I observed the use of lighthearted humor, which contributed to lightening the mood and releasing stress. One of the tensions in the room involved Rita's impulse to stay on task regarding the DEIS review process and Ian's interest in combining the discussion with the DSE hearings (the next agenda item) because these two topics involved overlapping tasks (DC9, 9/13/12). When it was his turn to speak, Ian seemed to unwittingly preface his comments with the phrase, "As long as it won't cloud the issue…" Hearing laughter, he recognized the pun and chuckled along with the group.

Continuing to speak, Ian mentioned the need to find affordable and even voluntary experts that could testify during the upcoming DSE water hearings on issues such as air quality without monetary remuneration. Suddenly, Jamie exclaimed, "Well, everyone knows it's an express lane to heaven, so that shouldn't be too difficult!" Ian's pun followed by Jamie's capricious (and satirical) quip resulted in two moments when the group collectively laughed. The laughter helped to release the tensions that were building in the room over the amount of time the group could afford to spend discussing how best to leverage finite resources in order to effectively participate in forthcoming state and federal administrative decision-making processes. Rita had categorized them as two separate topics and was pushing to deal with strategies for the DEIS review process, because it was coming up before the group would meet together, again. Ian, involved in

legal preparations for both the DEIS review process and the DSE scheduled for later on that year, perceived value in discussing ideas for a team of affordable experts that could function as resources for both processes. Between his pun and Jamie's wisecrack about finding volunteer experts, the mood shifted from fatigued and tense to more lively and interactive. Participation increased as evidenced by a higher frequency and number of hands in the air. Ideas for whom to contact and consider began to flow. In spite of the post-lunch slump, the group successfully brainstormed a series of names for DEIS reviewers *and* potential witnesses in the DSE hearings. Concurrently, various participants agreed to make contact with these individuals.

Now, I will analyze how lighthearted humor during this segment of the meeting helped function to release tensions and free up energy to sustain group deliberation. Ian's pun and Jamie's satirical remark resulted in two moments of back-to-back group laughter during an otherwise wearisome session between lunch and the afternoon break that day. Recall Dave's comment, "…keeping a sense of humor is pretty crucial to staying sane and staying on task with one another." To claim a causal relationship, here, between lighthearted humor and productivity would be an overreach. However, lighthearted humor helped to release energy and to enliven the mood in the room through collective laughter. This mood shift from weary/tense to lively/engaged implies that lighthearted humor can function to release pent up energy that can manifest as group interactivity. In this example, lighthearted humor is an antecedent to increased participation and collaboration across action items on the agenda. Individuals figuratively rolled up their sleeves and synergistically went to work on *both* of these agenda items as they brainstormed names of potential experts and witnesses for both the state and federal

processes. Thus, lighthearted humor is associated with a complex array of elements relating to group capacity for productivity and collaboration and it functions to enliven group interactions in the context of sluggish and tense group interactions. Let us turn to another example.

In addition to helping the group work through low-energy and tense moments, lighthearted humor can also address moments when the group feels overwhelmed or beleaguered. Agenda items in the afternoon of RWD strategy sessions often include a discussion about how to improve fund raising and outreach to broader publics. As individuals identify the challenges associated with doing this, the mood of the group can be a bit glum. For example, in a discussion about outreach in the same meeting discussed above, and after taking an afternoon break, Tony alluded to a certain social "element that believes everything should be sacrificed for urban centers," to which John added, "It's an uphill battle to get the rural message out. We need to get to the Secretary of the Interior. How can we get to D.C.? We have to be bigger than we are at the moment." In this context, Tony asked "What is RWD's role? Rural Water Defender's role needs to be defined and it needs to be big." Rita, who was facilitating the meeting, added, "Star power is good." Then, Ian suggested, "Robert Redford?" Immediately Tony interjected, "Sarah Palin!" Everyone burst into laughter at this witty juxtaposition of these two public figures - the first a renowned actor, environmentalist and plausible ally; the second - a former Alaskan governor, 2008 vice presidential candidate known for her "Drill baby drill!" campaign slogan - an unlikely ally from the perspective of coalition Democrats, but a plausible ally, from the perspective of coalition Republicans, since Sarah Palin had aligned herself with conservative western rural Republicans during her campaign.[19] More

to the point, the laughter brightened the mood in the room as hands went up, indicating an interest in speaking, and ideas flowed about reaching out to public figures that might have an interest in helping the cause. Suggestions included connecting with organizations and people with larger spheres of influence such as: Trout Unlimited, The Sierra Club, The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), "folks on national boards and with D.C. contacts," Maude Barlow (an internationally renowned Canadian water activist), Public Citizen, bell hooks ("an ecofeminist"), the producers of the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, Sean White (a popular snow boarding Olympian), and other sports figures with younger audiences. Rita wrapped up the brainstorming session with her comment, "Blessings! Go where you can." And she repeated the phrase, "Star power is good."

In this example, a witty joke helped the group to release the tension that was building while focusing on stark realities of finite material resources. The laughter lightened the gloomy mood. The group's focus shifted from a rather somber look at obstacles facing the coalition to a productive discussion on ways to overcome the obstacles. This renewed energy culminated in Rita's delight as revealed in her benediction, "Blessings! Go where you can." In this way, lighthearted humor contributed to the release of static energy in the group. The mood shifted from solemn/overwhelmed to cheerful/creative. Let us turn to another example.

The third example of lighthearted humor occurred later, after the afternoon break, and during the same meeting referenced above. Rita, the facilitator, shared a coalition participant's criticism of RWD: "Alonso calls us a headless organization with no one in charge." Appu retorted, "No one to target!" In the midst of group laughter, Joe, a rancher from one of the basins in question exclaimed, "*I am the target!*" and laughter continued

to fill the room. This may have been, in part, nervous laughter or what one does instead of lamenting, as this particular rancher is one of a number of coalition participants in the area with much to lose. Joe's ranching operation represents a geographic "ground zero" should the aqueduct project come to fruition.[20] Immediately following Joe's comic humor, John, a rural community leader that resides in the same basin as Joe, expressed the importance of thinking "big" about strategic pathways forward. Another brainstorming session ensued with a focus on campaign slogans. Jamie suggested: Northerners Opposed to the Project (NOPE) placed inside a red octagonal (stop) sign. Sarah piggybacked on this idea by using the same symbol, but suggested switching the slogan to: Stand Together to Oppose the Project (STOP). Another participant suggested keeping the acronyms and adding a cross section of a conduit with a diagonal line crossing through the conduit's image as a symbol within the octagonal sign. The brainstorming continued with ideas surfacing on how to connect to broader audiences through likely alliances with other organizations, Washington DC contacts and "star power" contacts. Action steps followed. Ian asked, "Who might be able to contact Robert Redford?" Returning to the political joke from earlier that same afternoon, he gestured to Tony and asked, "Can you get Sarah Palin?" The room was filled with laughter, again, and what had begun as an organizational critique had morphed into a creative and productive set of possible campaign slogans and action steps ending the meeting in an upbeat fashion.

In addition to illuminating the invigorating function of lighthearted humor, this example also demonstrates how lighthearted humor is comic humor directed internally within the coalition. In the last example above, criticism from a coalition participant was

met with lighthearted humor within a comic frame. Rita's decision to share Alonso's critique of RWD's leadership structure (or lack thereof) demonstrates openness on her part, as one of the leaders in the group, to internal criticism. The group's ability to laugh about their collective and somewhat dire situation, in response to criticism, harkens back to Burke's (1959) description of the comic frame: "the methodic view of human antics as a comedy, albeit as a comedy ever on the verge of the most disastrous tragedy" (p. xiii). Appu's lighthearted and witty retort, "No one to target!" suggests that the loose structure of the organization is an asset, not a deficit. Joe's rebuttal to Appu's comment, "*I am the target!*" reminds the group that the outcome of their work will have serious material consequences, particularly for those living in the targeted basins for the aqueduct project. In short, this is an example of comedy on the verge of tragedy. Campaign slogan ideas flowed following the cathartic laughter in this example suggesting some kind of complex relationship between lighthearted humor within a comic frame in internal coalition communication and creative, collaborative potential.

I am not claiming that lighthearted humor causes creativity, productivity and collaboration, but we can see through these examples that comic lighthearted humor is often an antecedent to increased participation, collaboration, creativity (e.g., brainstorming) and productivity. These forms of group interactions involve an open communication climate. Wood (2008) summarizes scholarship that draws on Martin Buber's work to describe the qualities of an open communication climate. These qualities include: "spontaneity, equality, provisionalism, [a] problem orientation, empathy and description" (p.146).[21] The fact that lighthearted humor often precedes these forms of group interactions implicates it as a sign of open communication.

Lighthearted humor certainly does seem to invigorate the group, enliven the mood, and perhaps increase the stamina necessary to remain productive when the mood is gloomy or participants are feeling overwhelmed. Moreover, insomuch as lighthearted humor causes collective laughter in RWD meetings, it can function cathartically by releasing tensions and creating a playful and open atmosphere with liberated energy that can be put toward creative, collaborative and productive means. And, as Ian put it during member checks, humor "leads to a looser, more free ranging collective thought process in my opinion, that does lead to greater creativity," (DC9, 9/13/12).

In this way, the delivery of lighthearted humor is a rhetorical tactic in any given moment that contributes to collective resources and stamina to accomplish the work at hand. My observations of RWD meetings indicate a pattern of lighthearted humor throughout the meetings I attended. Thus, I am suggesting the *practice* of lighthearted humor is a rhetorical strategy and a dimension of coalition maintenance because within lighthearted humor emerges feelings of collective enjoyment and liberated energy that are associated with an open communication climate.

These last three examples, above, demonstrate how lighthearted humor was used sporadically during an afternoon session in one daylong strategy meeting (4/2/11). While the mood is lighter in some meetings than others and certain individuals tend to joke more than others, this jovial and playful quality of the RWD's internal coalition communication helps make the work fun. Sarah, one of the leading coordinators of RWD, explains the role of humor in coalition meetings "It's our physical expression of just being tickled, just tickled to death [chuckles] …enjoying being alive…which is not the opposite of work. You know, work is part of it" (DC2, 10/16/11). Thus, according to

Sarah, lighthearted humor is a physical expression of joy. The interesting dynamic here, is the way that lighthearted humor works within the context of internal coalition communication to release tensions, brighten the mood, and free up energy for engaged participation. As such, lighthearted humor is comic humor that is indicative of and functions to help maintain an open communication climate.

In sum, lighthearted humor helps to unite and energize the group during face-to-face strategy meetings, which helps to keep coalition participants collectively engaged with the arduous and on-going work to defeat the aqueduct, in spite of constitutive differences. The initiative demands rigorous and relentless work, and lighthearted humor creates positive associations with it. A playful quality to the interactions among the participants helps to maintain an open communication climate toward participant engagement with the campaign. Therefore, lighthearted humor is a rhetorical strategy and an important dimension of coalition maintenance. Next, I will describe a second form of humor in internal coalition communication.

Self-deprecating Humor

Self-deprecating humor entails the ability to laugh at oneself by setting aside one's ego and demonstrating a willingness to have some humility. As I will show, in the context of the RWD, it is a rhetorical strategy that helps to soften some of the discomfort that arises in cross-cultural conflict situations within the coalition. Self-deprecating humor "removes fear [or the specter of an alien Other]" explains Ruby, a local Native American, during a member check session (2/13/12). This aligns with Norrick and Spitz's (2010) finding that humor, particularly self-deprecating humor, "can diffuse the

aggression of conflict talk" (p. 88). I assert that self-deprecating humor is a rhetorical strategy that diffuses cross-cultural tensions because it constitutes a discursive move toward identity vulnerability. This suggests that the patterned practice of self-deprecating humor among disparate parties in coalition interactions is a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance.

Self-deprecating humor, within the context of RWD's internal coalition communication, can function to invite careful listening and, like lighthearted humor, it also helps maintain an open communication climate. During RWD's strategy meetings, especially when one or several participants perceive that the group's direction is posing a potential threat to their specific interests or sensibilities, communicative tensions arise. In these moments of tension, I often observed self-deprecating humor, followed by the group engaging in careful listening and an open communication climate with a collaborative orientation. While I am not claiming a direct causal relationship between self-deprecating humor and careful listening or between self-deprecating humor and an open communication climate, my analysis explores these relationships.

When conflicts over strategy emerge within the RWD, utterances and mediated communication channels can take the form of personal attacks within a melodramatic frame, although this is discouraged. For example, a letter about an internal RWD conflict had been circulating among participants on the Internet. Stories were also traveling within the RWD about comments made in a bar that amounted to personal attacks on particular coalition participants. Personal attacks (intended or otherwise) are evidence of discursive differences and cultural tensions that can close down or attenuate an open communication climate.[22] Remarks like these have resulted in the harboring of negative

feelings among participants, including anger that can even result in individual decisions to withdraw from the coalition or for RWD participants to stop inviting particular individuals to group meetings.

In response to the example described above, the RWD addressed the issue of personal attacks and internal conflicts in a meeting. Ian, one of the attorneys for the coalition stood up at the beginning of one of the meetings to discuss what he viewed as the inappropriate disclosure of internal coalition conflicts in public spaces. After Ian coached the group on how best to handle such differences a group deliberation about this particular conflict issue - a proposed interstate compact - ensued.

During the controversial discussion of the interstate compact, I noticed that participants did not engage in personal attacks, but rather utilized self-deprecating humor as a way to address differences. The discussion began with two ranchers, both with opposing viewpoints over the value of a signed interstate water compact between Desert State and Mountain State, taking turns to air their divergent perspectives. It is noteworthy that one of these ranchers, Randy, has lived outside of the area and has been a wilderness advocate in the Intermountain region whereas the other rancher, Joe, identifies with a more traditional rural ranching perspective. Rita explains that Randy represents a unique ranching perspective:

> People know that he [Randy] has a serious side and a funny side and he, and he laughs at himself… He's, he is just so amusing and he, sometimes he means to be, but sometimes he gets out that Wiley Coyote -I mean …He's had years and years of experience and I remember when he was with [an antinuclear campaign in the 80's]. I remember when he was promoting wilderness, ah I mean, he has a long environmental career that most people don't know about. (DC6, 11/09/11)

Put another way, one rancher, Joe, identifies with a more traditional rural ranching perspective, which historically balks at environmental discourses, and the other rancher,

Randy, identifies with a less traditional ranching perspective - one that embraces environmental and wilderness discourses.

Unfortunately, I do not have detailed notes of this interchange as it unfolded in the moment. This was the very first RWD meeting that I attended and due to my lack of history, relationship, experience and trust with the group, I felt that extensive note taking might jeopardize my accessibility to the group in the future.[23] What I do know from my field notes from this interchange, however, is that both of the ranchers used self-deprecating forms of humor in their opening comments. Joe demonstrated deference to others by acknowledging that he was a "bull-headed stubborn old goat," and he proceeded to explain how he had come to his position in favor of a signed interstate compact. Randy also used self-deprecating humor in his opening comments. He made an appeal to their commonalities as ranchers and then said something similar to, "I may be the craziest and oldest goat here, and yet sure as I am sittin' here, I think signin' that interstate compact will do nothin' other than hand UWD their aqueduct on a silver platter." Then he proceeded to offer a counter-argument (10/17/09).

In this example, each rancher used a form of self-deprecating humor before explicating his passionate opinion about a controversial issue. This demonstrated willingness, by both ranchers, to laugh at themselves and to be a little bit vulnerable. Joe's willingness to call himself a "bull-headed stubborn old goat" is a sign of self-awareness. It demonstrates Joe's ability to laugh at himself and to imagine how others might view him. It is also a sign of nonaggression since stubbornness implies holding onto a position rather than seeking to persuade or offensively change another. Thus, it tacitly conveyed that aggression was not the name of the game. The humility, in Joe's

opening self-disclosure as "old" and "stubborn" conveyed that his ego was not a major factor in explicating his position. Then, Randy reciprocated in his opening statement, "I may be the craziest old goat here…" which likewise demonstrated a willingness to be vulnerable, non-aggressive and to create distance between his ego and his position. In other words, humility created a space for opposing perspectives on the idea of an interstate compact.[24] Distancing identity from substance through the use of self-deprecating humor contributed to an open communication climate – one in which participants freely expressed their viewpoints, ideas, suggestions and concerns. In this way, self-deprecating humor is a strategy for inviting and maintaining an open communication climate in the context of internal coalition conflict.

We can also see how self-deprecating humor is comic humor. It fits well within Burke's (1959) synthesis of the comic corrective:

> In sum, the comic frame should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*. Its ultimate would not be passiveness, but *maximum consciousness*. One would "transcend" himself [sic] by noting his own foibles. He would provide a rationale for locating the irrational and the non-rational. (p.171)

Certainly self-deprecating humor is one way to note one's foibles and to demonstrate self-awareness. It is noteworthy that Burke links self-observation (or self-reflexivity) and "maximum consciousness" with active learning and transcending one's "own foibles." Joe elaborated on the value of learning from one another's experiences during my interview with him. For example, he explained that a presentation he made for an unfamiliar audience did not seem to go as well as he would have liked. When he got in the car, Joe became frustrated as he requested a critique from a RWD participant/environmentalist:

> Joe: Listen, I am not asking you for that. I am asking you for criticism and explanation, 'cuz I believe that you know why I wasn't productive and I don't like it when you are playing around trying not to hurt my feelings. You're not going to hurt my feelings, except if you won't tell me what you think I did wrong or how I could have improved. Quit beatin' around the bush and get the -
> Deb: [Chuckling]
> Joe: And an hour and a half later I quit taking notes.
> Deb: Wow!
> Joe: I mean it was valuable. It was a valuable piece of education. So you know…Capable environmentalists … tell me how I should talk maybe to gain [traction with unfamiliar audiences]. (DC1)

In this scenario, Joe, demonstrates an ability to set aside his ego in order to learn from a RWD participant that he describes as a "capable environmentalist." While this text does not feature comic self-deprecating humor, it is another example of distancing ego from substance and it is evidence that Joe values the ability to learn collaboratively across cultural tensions and discursive difference. In this scenario, Joe had to explicitly remove his pride from the equation (e.g., "You're not going to hurt my feelings…") in order to provide enough safety for his interlocutor to risk offering him a critique. In both Joe's humble solicitation for criticism and in the former example of self-deprecating humor used by traditional and nontraditional ranchers, there is a pattern of open communication (e.g., constructive criticism) preceded by overtly humble discursive acts in the context of cross-cultural tension. During a small group member check in which I asked participants to describe from their perspective on how self-deprecating humor functions in the group, Ruby explained that it removes fear, because it "puts their [participants'] guard[s'] down." Jamie suggested that self-deprecating humor makes participants more open to hearing what is being said. And Sean asserted, "We all have strong personalities that can clash. It helps us to get around that. We make ourselves vulnerable with the hope that we can get our message across to the other side with less interference" (06/18/12). Moreover,

during another member check, Ian suggested that "humor reduces the danger of being embarrassed or criticized," to which I add that it is self-deprecating humor that especially functions in this manner by softening cultural stigmas associated with public embarrassment and criticism. Thus, I suggest that self-deprecating humor is comic humor that invites careful listening and helps to promote and maintain open communication in cross-cultural contexts.

In sum, the motive of the rhetors in these examples above is to constructively critique disparate ways to view issues or situations without framing the character of those who hold opposing positions in a negative light. This is a classic example of Burke's (1959) description of the comic frame as a "charitable" frame without being "gullible" (p.107). I posit that self-deprecating humor within this comic frame represents an attitude of diminished ego-attachment to respective positions. In this way, self-deprecating humor in the examples, above, are expressions of humility that help to open the communication climate and to invite careful listening. This, as I will explain further below, implicates self-deprecating humor as a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance.

A third example of self-deprecating humor shows how it can also be a sign of an open communication climate that includes careful listening. At a summer meeting, Rita began soliciting reports from individuals in the group. After several participants gave their reports, Rita motioned to one of the ranchers, "Randy?" Randy said, "I have to hear something first!" He chuckled and the whole group burst into laughter. Making fun of himself for being hard of hearing conveyed a willingness, on Randy's part, to be openly vulnerable. It also invited others to speak more loudly, which they did, including Rita,

who moved directly in front of him and spoke loudly, facing him so that he could read her lips and hear her better.

Rita then repeated her prompt for Randy to offer a report to the group. You could have heard a pin drop in the room. Everyone was focused on what Randy was about to say. He proceeded to comment about interbasin water transfers; their consequences for rural communities; disconnections from agriculture; the water and food nexus; and he told stories about bathing in the creeks of the Southeast and open-air bathtubs in the desert Southwest. As he finished speaking, he looked around the room and acknowledged the value of the group. He remarked about the learning that had occurred among them over time. Then he asserted, "If we lose [the] ability to hold together, we lose it all!" In this third example, we can see a constellation of remarks involving self-deprecating humor, an attentive audience and the criticality of maintaining coalition unity. This does not imply any causality among self-deprecating humor, an attentive audience and the ability for the coalition to hold together. Rather, it shows how self-deprecating humor is a sign of the group's capabilities to create an open communication climate that features careful listening in the context of cross-cultural coalition communication.

Each of these three examples demonstrates how self-deprecating humor is associated with careful listening and maintenance of an open communication climate toward constructive criticism and collaborative learning. Randy's reminder that the coalition's strength in diversity can also be its Achilles heal demonstrates Randy's awareness of the importance of learning from past mistakes and cross-cultural collaboration. I have also suggested that self-deprecating humor is a rhetorical strategy that can help to diffuse cross-cultural tensions because it constitutes a discursive move

toward identity vulnerability. This is an act of humility, which Burke (1959) asserts is necessary within a comic frame, particularly in a situation where multiple identities conflict. While Burke makes this claim in reference to an "internal war, with one identity 'rebuking' the other," I argue that conflicting identities do not necessarily need to be housed within the same body in order for this same principle to apply (p.101). The act of making light of one's shortcomings diminishes pride and the attachment between ego and a particular set of ideas. The discursive move toward identity destabilization (or vulnerability) in the context of internal coalition conflict, signals to others that the primary motive (of the rhetor) is to share a perspective decoupled from pride and the aggressive or competitive impulses that drive the need to be right. Doing this not only reflects the group's rapport, but also invites others to reciprocate or perhaps through *mimesis*, at least let down their guard a little bit.

There is much at stake in the process of fighting what one participant described as "battle after battle" in order to win the "war" (2/28/10). In sum, it appears that self-deprecating humor delivered within a comic frame in internal coalition communication is not only a sign of an open communication climate that encourages deep listening and criticism (toward collaborative learning) across cultural tensions and discursive differences, but a message that conveys humility and nonaggression. As such, there may be stronger linkages among these elements of internal coalition communication. In fact, during a member check in reference to self-deprecating humor, careful listening and an open communication climate, Ian wrote, "Actually, Deb, as one who has been immersed in this milieu and process for a while, I really think there is a causal link between these things," (DC9, 9/13/12). Nevertheless, self-deprecating humor practiced over time in

internal coalition communication is a significant rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance. Now, let us take a look at the third form of humor I have identified in RWD's internal coalition communication.

Satire and Irony

Satire is a form of humor that exposes and derides human stupidity, vice or folly. Irony is a form of humor that uses words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning and it can be used as a form of satire. I lump these forms of humor together because they both function to identify and critique the stupidity of underlying problems within social systems and complicit practices. Moreover, satire and irony serve as rhetorical tools to generate heightened awareness of failings of the system that RWD participants are striving to change even as they operate within it. In this section I argue that satire and irony are forms of comic humor that contribute to collaborative learning and coalition maintenance, because in the process of critiquing systemic problems, coalition participants mentor one another and they reify their shared assumption that solving systemic problems and system failures is a viable enterprise.

Private sector influences on public officials are commonly alluded to with irony in RWD meetings. Once, during a strategy meeting, Dave made mention that he was proposing a new costume for the Verdant Valley parade. He later showed me a mask that he had made that had an image of Kenneth Gordon, the UWD chief executive, on a popsicle stick and an accompanying hand sign that quoted Mr. Gordon referencing the idea for developing the water project as "the singularly most stupid idea anyone's ever had" (DC5). In this example, Dave points out the irony of Mr. Gordon's initial response

to the project in juxtaposition to his present day role as the "face" of the large interbasin transfer project.

Similarly irony and satire are also directed at elected officials. During the same meeting in February, the group was grappling with how best to request an extension to the public participation period for the DEIS. In this context, a participant asked, "Could Mountain State higher ups request longer time, or [could] someone else, like the Congressional Delegation?" Dave quipped, "Mountain State doesn't have one. They were absent without leave on this project" (2/28/20). Snickers were audible throughout the room. This cynicism about Mountain State's elected officials figuratively "dropping the ball" when Mountain State's water rights are at stake alludes to Congressional power structures and failings within the system, a hallmark of the comic frame. As Burke puts it:

> Often, we can reapply, for incorporation in the "comic" frame, a formula originally made in the euphemistic or debunking modes of emphasis, by merely changing our *attitude* toward the formula. We "discount" it for comic purposes, subtly translating it...This strategy even opens us to the resources of "popular" philosophy, as embodied not only in proverbs and old saws, but also in the working vocabulary of every-day relationships. Thus we can incorporate the remarkable terms of politics and business, two terminologies [that] quickly chart and simplify constantly recurring relationships of our society. (pp. 172-173)

Dave's remark that the Mountain State Congressional Delegation was "absent without leave on this project" is an example of an old military saw that quickly charts recurring phenomena in politics. With this remark, he is implying that it is the job of the delegation to protect ground water that supports life in Mountain State, and he is suggesting that graft and congressional power politics are at play in the absence of the Congressional Delegation's defense of Mountain State's ground water in Verdant Valley (DC5). At a public Mountain State water meeting in a small western rural town, a RWD participant

once placed a sign near the entrance that read, "Who's afraid of Patrick Quinnert?" This is another example of an attempt to debunk or expose back room power politics, since Patrick Quinnert is not only a member of the congressional delegation for Desert State, he also is widely regarded as one of the leading power brokers in Washington D.C. This message about fear implies that change is possible, not only through political pressure, but also in the amount of symbolic power constituents grant to their elected representatives.

This next example demonstrates a tension between the aspiration for change within a comic frame and the need to avoid being gullible or susceptible to false promises. In a Desert State meeting, Sean, a conservation ecologist, mentioned that the government needed to treat the tribes better (01/09/10). Ruby retorted, "They haven't in the past." Ian chimed in, "With the new administration, we have to get the message across that they can't ignore the tribes." And Ruby responded, "I didn't have a dream!" Everyone busted up laughing at Ruby's satirical reference to Martin Luther King's famous speech, and her painfully frank acknowledgement of historic marginalization and rhetorical exclusion of Native American tribes (Endres, 2009). This is yet another example of a comic frame. Burke writes:

> The comic frame of acceptance but carries to completion the translative act. It considers human life as a project in "composition," where the poet works with the materials of social relationships. Composition, translation, also "revision," hence offering maximum opportunity for the resources of *criticism*. (p.173)

Thus, satire and irony used within the context of internal coalition communication is comic humor that recognizes stark realities without letting go of the assumption that systemic failures are works in process that are constituted by relational compositions that can be revised and redressed.

Over a year later, during a spring meeting, there was a discussion about the fact that hydrological studies performed by the UWD and its consultant appeared to have been blatantly skewed in a result-oriented manner that produced unrealistically high recharge rates along the Dry Gulch Mountain Range and near a cherished public park (04/02/11). Randy broke into the conversation asking, "Water flow still seeks its own level. They haven't repealed that have they?" Alex, the hydrologist answered, "No, water flows toward money, didn't you know that?" Everyone chuckled.

These examples demonstrate how satire and irony serve as rhetorical tools to generate heightened awareness of failings of the system within which RWD participants are operating even as they strive to change it. Burke (1959) reminds us that the comic frame helps us to be on the lookout for "private appropriation of the public domain" (p. 169). By highlighting corruption and injustices, RWD participants keep one another acutely aware of the challenges they face. This may serve as a reminder that anyone of them could get bought off at any time. Perhaps, in this way, it serves to warn all participants of their vulnerabilities and to reenlist each member's willingness to continue to fight. An example of what I mean by this follows.

One of the hydrologists that conducts analytic modeling for RWD suggested that UWD would have to file change applications anytime they want to relocate a well. "We can fight the change applications," a RWD participant suggested in response to the idea of a UWD game of "musical water wells" that the coalition would have to track. "I will be dead," Lily uttered. "I will live forever," remarked Ian in a rather droll (superhero) voice. "Not if you keep getting up at 4:00 AM!" Lily quipped. Laughter filled the room (04/02/11). This excerpt serves as an example of satirical humor, the comic frame and the

inordinate challenges RWD faces in the wake of a well-funded, politically "greased" initiative to develop and export ground water from a rural mountain region to a large western urban area.

In sum, humor marked by irony and satire in internal coalition communication are signs that the group is operating within a broad comic frame and that they are finding ways to work together, within extant systems. Ironic and satirical remarks also generate relief for the group (as discussed earlier in the section on lighthearted humor), but this form of humor also engages a type of collaborative mentoring. It functions as a comic corrective or a nuanced way to laugh and learn from one another's insights, warnings and lived experiences. This form of mentoring practiced over time, fosters participation toward activism with maximum awareness of the failings of the system. Seeing failings in the system is key to coalition maintenance because these failings drive the desire to continue engaging in the fight for collective change for improved futures. Thus, satire and irony are forms of humor that are implicated as dimensions of coalition maintenance. I will now turn to the last form of humor that I have identified through participant observation of the RWD strategy sessions.

Humor at the Expense of Others

Humor at the expense of others (e.g., name calling or attacking the identity of another) is a form of humor that denigrates the target. It is a unique form of humor within the coalition, because as I will show it functions within either a melodramatic or a comic frame. As I have pointed out, RWD's internal coalition communication primarily operates within a comic frame. Every now and then, however, the whole group shifts

from a comic to a melodramatic frame while still managing to maintain productive coalition communication. As I will show, an important aspect of coalition maintenance is to use comic humor at the expense of others directed to people within the coalition and melodramatic humor at the expense of others directed to people outside of the coalition. As Myer (2000) points out, forms of humor can be divergent or convergent creating divisions or unity among communicators, respectively. Melodramatic frames result in divergence and comic frames tend toward convergence. In this section, I examine how RWD participants use both comic and melodramatic forms of humor at the expense of others.

I argue that comic humor at the expense of others within the coalition is convergent humor. This comic form of humor at the expense of others is primarily used if the relationship between the rhetor and the target is one of trust that is strong enough to withstand the rhetorical blow. In these instances the message is intended as a form of teasing or constructive criticism within a comic frame. For example, Lily (an occasional facilitator for the RWD meetings) once teased Rita (the regular facilitator) by telling her that she needed more chocolate when she was trying to get an afternoon discussion off the ground (04/02/11). This form of constructive criticism was well-received by Rita, who remarked "Is that what I need? I was thinking about something else." Dave replied, "No, that's later." And Lily added, "Karen (a local business woman and restaurant owner) can probably provide that." Everyone chuckled.

I argue that melodramatic humor, at the expense of opponents and situational exigencies, is a rhetorical strategy in internal coalition communication that is dynamically related to refreshing and rejuvenating group cohesion (Frey, 1999, pp. 207-209). This

implicates melodramatic humor as a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance. If directed toward people inside the coalition, melodramatic humor would be divergent humor. It would risk breaking down trust in specific relationships and group cohesion. However, when directed outside of the coalition toward the opposition, melodramatic humor functions to construct a sense of solidarity and collective identity as moral actors fighting evil villains that represent never-ending greed and corruption.

This is in line with what Gregg (1971) calls the ego-function of protest rhetoric, wherein internal rhetoric to members of the social movement is meant to encourage group cohesion and belonging. Melodramatic humor at the expense of others can solidify the group and encourage coalition maintenance. For example, at a meeting in the heart of Desert State, a participant facetiously remarked, "Ken Gordon is a god and we are all praying to him." Another participant said, "This man needs to go!" "Man?" Lily asked. "I think devil is the proper term." (02/13/12). When humor at the expense of *opponents* functions within a melodramatic frame in the RWD strategy sessions, it serves to galvanize, to identify and clarify positions that are collectively shared among core coalition participants and to differentiate coalition communicators from their amoral rhetorical devils, the aqueduct proponents (Kinsella et al., 2008; Schwarze, 2006).

Name-calling is the simplest example of melodramatic humor at the expense of others outside the coalition. Those who buy into unsustainable growth are "bubbleheads" (1/9/10). "Water buffaloes" in Mountain State are "gutless wonders" (1/9/10) and the figurehead for UWD is commonly referred to as just "Ken" or "Kenny" (02/28/10). Referencing him informally by his first name diminishes his stature as the chief executive of UWD. Within RWD communication, the connotation of Ken or Kenny is always

derogatory. The evil powers bestowed on Ken are tremendous, especially when the name is used as a stand in for UWD and those in positions of power that support the interbasin transfer project. The RWD coalition participants never waste any time or breath developing strategies to reform Ken and the corruption that he represents.

In another example, during one winter meeting, a little girl bolted into the room and scurried around before exiting through a different door. Someone interjected, "Those UWD moles [that Ken employs] are getting smaller and cuter every day!" Everybody laughed. When the agenda turned to a discussion about fund-raising, someone suggested that they could create a "Conniving Ken Doll – It talks but it lies!" "Yeah, but we'd need pins to stick in it," one participant quipped and gestured with delight, holding her hands up as if holding a voodoo doll out in front of her chest and with the other hand jabbing at it. Another participant piggybacked on this melodramatic humor adding, "Push Kenny's nose and steam comes out!" In short, these attacks on Ken's character frame him as a hot-headed liar that deserves nothing less than a torturous demise. The last remark literally refers to letting off steam. I argue that this is exactly what was going on in the group through this series of disparaging Ken/Kenny remarks. It was the end of another long day of RWD deliberations over strategies to continue the campaign to defeat the aqueduct. During this sequence of melodramatic humor, the atmosphere in the room was electric. Eyes were twinkling with delight as participants connected with broad smiles and laughter that could be heard throughout the entire room. The collective experience from the delivery of a series of melodramatic rhetorical blows toward external coalition targets rejuvenated a sense of solidarity and cohesion among the participants.

This implicates melodramatic humor as a strategy in coalition maintenance because not only does it bolster the identity of the rhetor as having the moral high ground and frame the enemy as evil, it also establishes and maintains the identity of the collective in opposition to this evil force. As Sean once exclaimed in the context of a RWD fund raising discussion, "I just want to point out that mutual hatred of the enemy is a strong force!" (07/26/10). Melodramatic humor directed away from coalition participants toward external targets, can function to maintain group cohesion and collective identity. While individual rhetors uttered disparaging remarks, and not everyone participated in the above described round of humor at Kenny's expense, no one expressed any consternation over of the denigration of his character, either. Thus, in this example, we can see how within particular *kairotic* moments of internal coalition communication, the collective motive can shift from a comic frame into a melodramatic frame that functions to solidify identities and bolster a sense of group cohesion. This shift can happen without disrupting the overarching comic frame, as I will demonstrate in the next example.

During a spring meeting, a participant was reporting on current events at a nearby public park (04/02/11). A new species had been discovered that hibernates in the winter and aestivates in the summer. This species is hermaphroditic and it only moves approximately one meter in its lifetime. Hearing this, one participant remarked rather tongue-in-cheek, "Well that's a helpful design." Another participant added, alluding to Ken Gordon's unwavering efforts to consummate the water grab, "We should name it "Creature Gordonish!" Everyone had a good laugh. The park report continued. Six rattlesnakes had been outfitted with transmitters. Spontaneously, there were jokes about

controlling them and sending them off "to Urbana for a nature walk with Kenny." The mood of the group kept lifting. In this example, we can see melodramatic humor at the expense of others, primarily Kenneth Gordon, UWD's chief executive, happening spontaneously and creatively. Jokes about him reveal a melodramatic orientation toward this figurehead. He must be defeated. Rattlesnakes might do the job. There is no hope for him to reform.

However, this temporary shift into the melodramatic frame was directed back into the overarching comedic frame by the facilitator. Rita harnessed the collective energy in the room and steered it toward staying on task with each other within a comic frame. She redirected the focus of the group away from personal attacks on opponents toward a task of expressed appreciation for favorable media coverage. Immediately after the jokes about Ken Gordon, Rita said, "We need to find a quiet way to thank Chris Jones" (an Urbana journalist). Without missing a trick, Ruby replied, "Note in a bottle?" Ruby's reference to an archaic (and quiet) way of communicating was a form of teasing Rita about needing to "find a quiet way" to thank this journalist, since Rita was most likely fishing for a volunteer to get the job done. This is an example of making fun at another's expense inside the coalition without attacking the identity of the other. Ruby's reference to archaic ways of communicating exemplifies humor at another's expense delivered within a comic frame. In other words, humor at the expense of another directed toward someone inside the coalition, refrains from melodrama, it eschews the derision of another's character and takes on a gentler form of teasing – a form of comic rhetoric.

This series of interchanges demonstrates how the forms and functions of humor can productively shift into a melodramatic frame at certain *kairotic* moments without

disrupting the overall function of the comic frame. Melodramatic humor happens far less frequently in RWD strategy sessions than do the first three forms of comic humor, discussed above. This frame is typically isolated in its use by particular individuals, but the whole collectivity does shift into a melodramatic frame, on occasion, as I have demonstrated above. In this case, the rhetorical blows are directed externally, beyond coalition participants, and reserved for the symbolic face of deceit, evil, corruption and greed. In these *kairotic* moments, the symbolic harming of opponents can release tension and solidify group cohesion and collective identity. Moreover, increased cohesion can function to enhance the efficacy potential of the group. Group communication research "has demonstrated a dynamic relationship between group cohesiveness and task performance, such that the more cohesive a group is, the more likely it will perform more effectively" (Frey, 1999, p. 209). As Frey (1999) reports, research demonstrates, enhanced group cohesion correlates with individual motivation to stay on task with others in a group (task performance) and a positive attitude toward continued participation. Thus, melodramatic humor at the expense of others is a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance.

Implications

This analysis of four forms of humor and their respective functions in internal coalition communication suggests that the categories are integrative. I parsed them into categories to describe them, but as we can see from the examples, the various forms of humor do not get used in clean categories. Satirical remarks follow whimsical quips and humor at the expense of others uttered within a melodramatic frame can precipitate more

gentle forms of internal teasing within a comic frame. This suggests that these forms and functions of humor that I have described in internal coalition communication are integrated in more complex and nuanced ways than described herein.

Take the roles of ego and humility in cross-cultural negotiation of tensions and discursive difference, for instance. The findings from this case study suggest that there could be a connection between self-deprecating forms of humor and collaborative learning (Daniels & Walker, 2001) within cross-cultural and environmental conflicts. As discussed above, self-deprecating forms of humor, as precursors to conflict talk, function to diminish (at least the appearance of) egocentric motives and diffuse fear of aggressive forms of conflict. Self-deprecating forms of humor can also foster or be a sign of an open communication climate that facilitates collaborative ways to negotiate cultural tensions and discursive differences. In the process, deep listening can occur and learning conversations can ensue. These findings suggest that there may be a relationship between setting one's ego aside and collaborative learning. In other words, egocentric talk is competitive talk, not collaborative. If the *telos* of communication is to learn collaboratively, developing methods for checking egos at the door might prove fruitful.

Contemporary spiritual writer, Eckhart Tolle (2005) in his *New York Times* bestselling book *A New Earth*, discusses the function of ego and identification:

> Whatever the ego seeks and gets attached to are substitutes for the Being that it cannot feel. You can value and care for things, but whenever you get attached to them, you will know it's the ego. And you are never really attached to a thing but to a thought that has 'I,' 'me,' or 'mine' in it. Whenever you completely accept a loss, you go beyond ego, and who you are, the I Am which is consciousness itself, emerges. (p. 28)

Put another way, when one identifies strongly with a particular idea, thought, or set of ideas, it can be extraordinarily challenging to suspend one's attachment to these ideas

long enough to hear and understand others' attachments to a radically different set of ideas that threaten the very value of the former's beloved attachments. Egos get in the way of our ability to be fully present with others as they describe radically different ways of perceiving reality and situational exigencies. Joking about one's own follies can set the stage for others to reciprocate by letting down their guard long enough to hear, imagine and perhaps even come to understand how disparate perspectives are plausible.

Another implication of this study is the ability of the comic and melodramatic frames to co-exist within coalition communication. I assert that vibrant (multicultural) coalitions are constituted by social dynamics that demand a master comic frame, but this frame can occasionally shift to a productive melodramatic frame under circumscribed conditions. Thus, the benefits of emotional and relational solidarity that can come from co-constructing rhetorical devils that are external to coalitions (Kinsella et al., 2008) during internal coalition communication can still be reaped without risking the divisions within coalitions that a melodramatic frame typically summons.

These findings should be of interest to scholars in rhetorical theory and social movements[25] because they build knowledge about rhetorical strategies for coalition maintenance in the context of an environmental social justice campaign. However, it is important to note that the RWD is comprised of mature individuals, some of whom share long-standing history and well-developed relationships. More study is needed to compare and contrast these findings with coalitions comprised of individuals with younger or more diverse ages, beyond face-to-face strategy meeting contexts, and with more limited histories among the individuals. Further, given the protracted nature of the interbasin transfer project, the RWD may do well to explore ways to debunk the political situation

using a melodramatic frame, while keeping in mind that *kairos* matters, as Bsumek and Schwarze suggest in Kinsella et al. (2008).

Conclusion

I have explored how humor is a rhetorical strategy for coalition maintenance, but more research is needed to test these findings in other internal coalition contexts and to explore possible relationships between ego attenuation and collaborative learning in cross-cultural and environmental conflicts.

Additionally, I have demonstrated how lighthearted humor, self-deprecating humor, irony and satire all function within a comic frame in the context of internal coalition communication. However, humor at the expense of others gets used within a melodramatic frame when it vilifies an enemy without any hope for redemption. This form of humor is typically reserved for denigrating the identities of individuals and organizational entities in alignment with the opposition outside of the coalition's sphere of influence. In the rare instances when this form of humor gets directed internally toward a coalition participant, it adopts a comic frame and refrains from attacking coalition participant identities to avoid undermining coalition cohesion. The presence of a master comic frame for internal coalition communication speaks to the significant diversity that constitutes the coalition and the compelling need to hail historic opponents as allies so as to maintain a united front against the proposed large interbasin water transfer project. In sum, internal coalition communication necessitates a comic frame that can occasionally and productively shift into a melodramatic frame in circumscribed situations.

Humor, I assert, is a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance, which entails the willingness to participate and to continue engaging in coalition work. My findings contribute to the scant literature on rhetorical humor by suggesting that humor is a sign of and a significant tool for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences that are inherent in coalitions formed to effect democratic change in late modernity. In the RWD coalition, without the practiced enjoyment of nuanced humor and the positive associations and outcomes that these various forms of humor cultivate (e.g., solidarity and cohesion) the collective wherewithal to continue fighting against the aqueduct in favor of sustainability for the region would likely attenuate. As Burke (1959) remarks, "whatever poetry may be, criticism had best be comic" (p. 107). Certainly, anyone interested in adopting best practices in internal coalition communication would do well to heed this advice.

Notes

[12] For an interesting essay on ecological influences in Burke's writings see Seigel (2004).

[13] See also Carlson's (1986) essay on Ghandi and the comic frame.

[14] Rural Water Defenders (RWD) is a pseudonym. See, additionally endnote vii.

[15] For scholarship on humor across disciplines and well beyond the scope of this chapter, see: Christiansen and Hanson (1996), Davies (2003), Garrett, Garrett, Torres-Rivera, Wilbur, and Roberts-Wilbur (2005), Gervais and Wilson (2005), Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig and Monarch (1998), Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young and Heerey (2001), Koller (1988), Oshima (2000), Paolucci (2006), Penson, Partridge, Rudd, Seiden, Chabner and Lynch (2005), Peterson, Peterson and Grant (2004), Pratt (1998), Stephenson (1951), and Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (2006).

[16] The pairing of the terms "environment" with "conflict" is commonly found in scholarly work, but the dyad "environment-comedy" is not, although "eco-comedy" in film is on the rise in popular culture after the end of the first decade of the new millennium (e.g. see *How to boil a frog: make friends/make fun/make trouble.* "This is a film that mixes rapid-fire humor with hard-hitting facts to show the consequences of overshoot: too many people using up too little planet, much too fast." http://howtoboilafrog.com/themovie/).

[17] For example, Tracy, Myers, & Scott (2006) focus on humor as it intersects with emotion management, resistance, collaboration, sense-making and constitutive processes of organizing. Dougherty (2004) treats humor and sense making in response to sexual harassment within an academic setting, and Martin (2004) reveals communication tactics employed by women in middle management, particularly when it is used to negotiate managerial identities. Additionally, Lynch (2002) argues that a communicative approach to humor can create a bridge between psychological approaches that attempt to explain why individuals use humor and sociological lenses that describe the various functions of humor.

[18] Pseudonyms for individuals, the primary water district organization, the coalition fighting the aqueduct and coalition research participants are substituted throughout this work in order to protect the identities of these individuals and organizations. Codes ranging from DC1 to DC10 reference specific interview content. Dates for when each interview occurred are noted in association with these codes the first time each unique code and date combination is referenced in the text. Thereafter, only the code is used as a reference. Meeting dates are provided when they involve direct quotes.

[19] When I conducted member checks, Ian wrote, "It is a humorous and odd feature of our group that we would have people with such radically different inclinations and

assumptions together in one coalition getting along and humoring each other without falling apart" (DC9, 9/13/12).

[20] This example is not intended to diminish, in any way, the major threats the proposed interbasin transfer project poses to the indigenous peoples and other residents or ranchers in the region.

[21] An open communication climate has similar qualities to that which results from invitational rhetoric. Foss and Griffin (1995) introduced the concept of an invitational rhetorical theory that eschews patriarchal impulses to dominate and change others. Invitational rhetoric, as they describe it, does not seek to persuade others to agree with one's perspective. Rather, it invites understanding of different perspectives that assume "equality," "immanent value," and "self-determination" for audience members (p.4).

[22] See also Anderson, Baxter & Cissna (2004) for an anthology on dialogue theory. The tonal quality of dialogue is often described as an open communication climate, wherein participants might choose to risk identity vulnerability through self-disclosure in a safe space with one another. Participants typically set ground rules such as pledging not to share anything learned in the dialogue with others outside of the dialogue.

[23] This concern was validated in subsequent conversations with a number of RWD participants.

[24] For a relevant read in popular literature about the role of ego as an impediment to new nature/culture paradigms see Tolle (2005).

[25] See, for example Cathcart (1972, 1978) and Smith and Windes (1975).

CHAPTER 5

PROCESS LITERACY AS RHETORICAL STRATEGY AND BEST PRACTICE

Opposition to the proposed aqueduct helps to keep the group united. As Sean expressed, keeping this focus on unity through opposition is paramount to the group's potential for success: "We've worked together for years in a wonderful alliance united against threats to the region. If we stray beyond that, we might find ourselves working on opposite sides of the fence." In spite of strong relationships that have been built over the years, even the most experienced activists have struggles and conflicts that emerge as they deliberate to arrive at action steps that everyone agrees will help the cause. For example, some participants repeatedly expressed interest in building the coalition through membership drives, while others valued the lean, grass roots structure that allows them to respond swiftly to changing political landscapes (or external exigencies). As Rita once put it during a strategy meeting, "We are time participants. We can turn on a dime," implying that developing a membership-based coalition might jeopardize RWD's ability to rapidly change course (or "turn on a dime") in response to relevant decisions and fluctuating political situations.

As legislative, administrative, and judicial decisions are made regarding the aqueduct, the RWD develops strategies to thwart momentum toward aqueduct approval.

To accomplish these goals, they use their strategy meetings and occasional teleconferences to identify and deliberate strategies for action steps moving forward. Not only do they have to negotiate external exigencies, such as the controversial two-state compact, they also have to negotiate internal cultural tensions and discursive differences as they work toward mutual agreements on action plans. To negotiate these complex rhetorical situations, they draw on one another's skills and expertise. Meeting these communicative challenges and maneuvering across shifting rhetorical situations in such a manner that diverse participants remain motivated to implement action steps and stay engaged in on-going coalition activities requires what I call *process literacy*.

Process literacy involves having an awareness of and the capacity to make interactive choices that encourage productive communication, especially during conflict situations. Productive conflict communication attends to the psychological and relational health of the participants, whereas destructive conflict communication worsens a situation and can result in harm to the participants (Kellett & Dalton, 2001, p. 4). Process literacy, then, functions like a discursive lubricant that keeps internal coalition communication productive across shifting rhetorical situations affected by external exigencies and group interactions. While process literacy can facilitate movement toward a variety of communicative genres, it primarily pivots interactions in internal coalition communication toward collaboration.

Both my professional background in environmental dispute resolution projects and research findings from this study inform my conception of process literacy. Process literacy in internal coalition communication engages third-party skill-sets (e.g., mediator and facilitator skills) that help to establish and maintain: (1) vibrant, confidential and

participatory communication processes; (2) mediation of internal tensions and (c)overt interpersonal or small group conflicts; and (3) discursive accommodations across cultural identity groups. Process literacy also involves supporting individual and collective willingness and capabilities to: listen and do dialogue, negotiate differences, brainstorm, suspend judgment, stay focused, trust the group, be vulnerable, speak dangerously (*parrhesia*), invent options for mutual gain, and critically evaluate options with an eye toward collective agreements. Process literacy, in other words, facilitates collaborative decision-making in internal coalition communication. Driven by external exigencies, process literacy pivots communicative dynamics in crucial *kairotic* moments toward a deliberative rhetorical framework - a framework that accommodates and engages inventive, suasory, creative, evaluative, and collaborative problem-solving steps toward mutual decisions (Doxtader, 2000; Ellis, 2012; Gastil, 1993; Welsh, 2002). Moreover, process literacy encourages what Makau and Marty (2001) call *cooperative argumentation* by privileging a collaborative communicative genre in response to internal coalition conflict.

In this chapter, I argue that best practices in internal coalition maintenance include the ability to shift from a competitive to a collaborative communicative genre in response to internal coalition conflict. I will demonstrate how process literacy is a rhetorical strategy that encourages this best practice in coalition maintenance. I will do this by exploring the ways in which RWD participants (conceived as a microcosm of the *demos*) use process literacy to negotiate conflict related to cultural tensions and discursive differences toward reaching mutual agreements on actions steps to challenge the proposed aqueduct project.

Explicating how process literacy works during internal coalition conflict contributes to knowledge in a number of ways. First, the analysis of rhetorical appeals that encourage inclusive participation within internal conflict and cross-cultural group decision-making contexts will contribute to our understanding of a deliberative rhetorical framework. For example, appeals that encourage inclusive participation in these contexts can inform scholarship that treats strategic cultural engagement in deliberative democracy (Welsh, 2002). Additionally, it will respond to Doxtader's (2000) call for exploration of a deliberative space in which rhetorical dynamics shift from "transgressive" (e.g., contravening) to "intersubjective" (e.g., mutual) approaches to decision-making (p. 339). Second, conflict and dialogue theories help us to understand communicative practices and processes that enable the negotiation of differences, though much of this literature treats interpersonal, small group and (inter) organizational conflicts with little influence from rhetorical theory. Mapping (dis)continuities between conflict and rhetorical theory in the realm of deliberative communication will encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas in ways that can contribute to each of these communication subdisciplines. Third, I claim that the ongoing practice of process literacy is a significant rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance. This knowledge not only contributes to rhetorical strategies for internal audiences in the rhetoric of social protest, it also holds practical application potential for contemporary and future coalitions formed to effect environmental change.

To accomplish these contributions, I will present a visual mapping of process literacy along with the key terms/components that help describe how process literacy works. After defining these terms, I will review and put into conversation, relevant theories from rhetorical theory, deliberative communication, and peace and conflict

literature to develop the concept of process literacy as a discursive lubricant that keeps communication productive across communicative genres and shifting rhetorical frameworks during internal coalition conflict. Then, I will identify, describe, and interpret three distinct characteristics (or capacity indicators) of process literacy and three rhetorical strategies associated with best practices for process literacy. I will do this by drawing on field interviews and participant observation in the RWD strategy meetings. I will point out how process literacy is a critical element in coalition maintenance along the way. Subsequently, I will discuss implications from this case study and the contributions these findings make toward scholarship at the nexus of rhetorical theory, peace and conflict studies, and cross-cultural deliberative communication. Finally, I will conclude with suggestions for additional research.

Process Literacy

In order to more fully explicate this concept of process literacy, I offer two schemas (Figures 1 and 2) and define the key components that comprise them. Before I define the components, I will briefly explain each figure. Figure 1 places the macro- and meso- terms that I will describe below into a conceptual map. It depicts internal coalition communication within three interlocking and overlapping circles that are embedded within the predominantly competitive socio-economic and political milieu of North America (depicted in the box), which generally falls within what has been termed a Western perspective.[26] These circles represent three different approaches to discursive

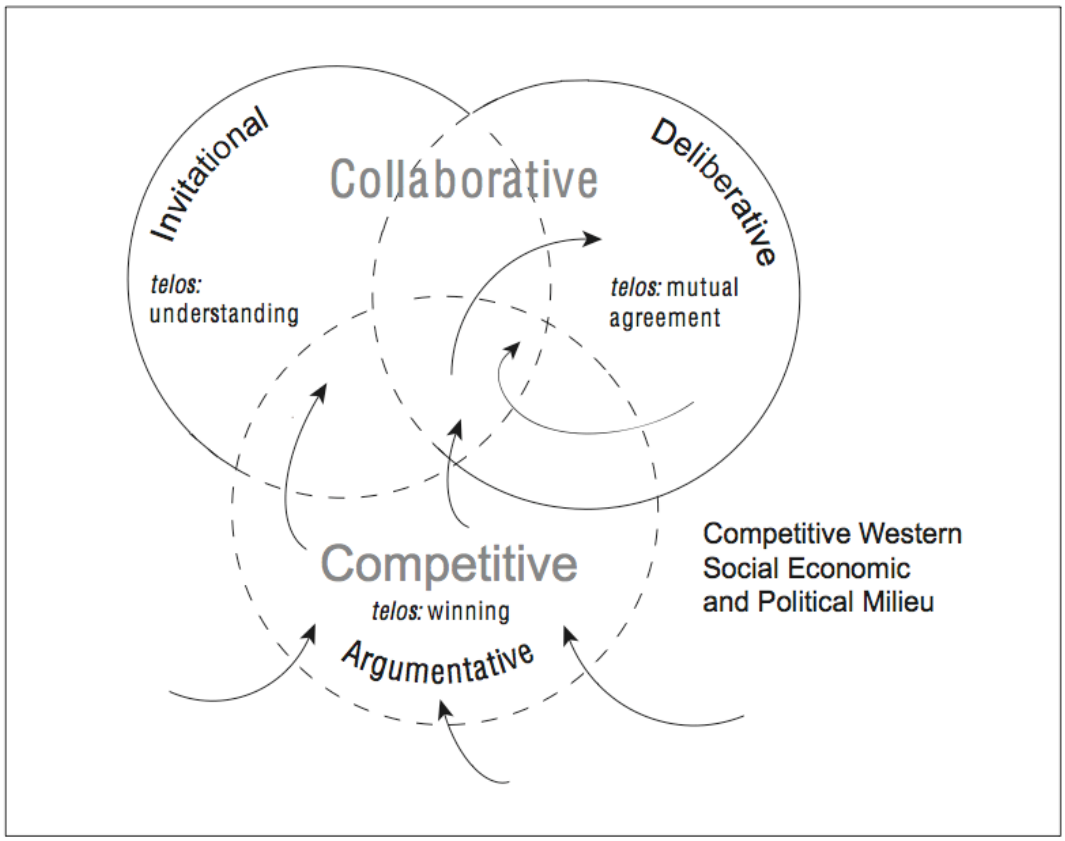

Figure 1. Communicative genres and the rhetorical dynamics of internal coalition communication. Process literacy supports movement across rhetorical frameworks toward a collaborative communicative genre and a deliberative rhetorical framework.

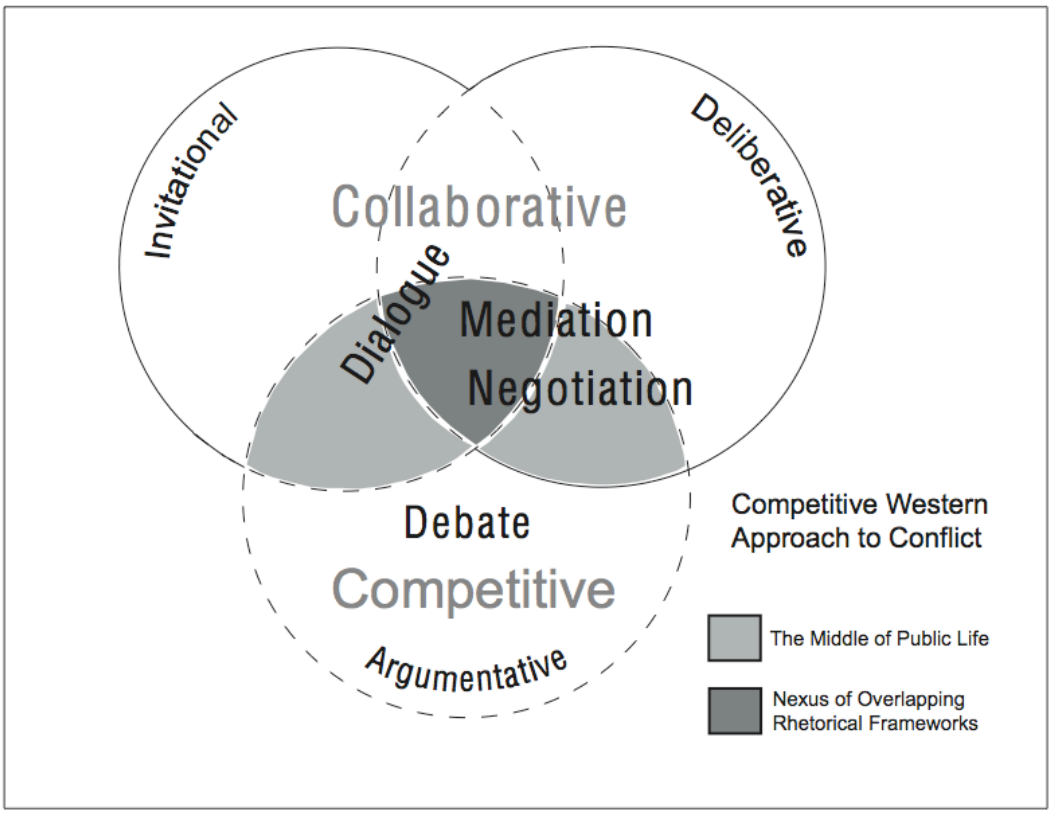

Figure 2. Locating conflict communication models within rehtorical frameworks.

differences and cultural tensions—invitational, deliberative, and competitive. The interplay of these approaches reveals the complexity of shifting rhetorical dynamics in coalition participant interactions. The perforated boundary of the bottom circle represents the natural permeation of a competitive Western milieu into a competitive argumentative approach to resolving differences.

In Western culture, it is common for those who disagree to treat one another as adversaries and disagreements as a battle to be won. Makau and Marty (2001), drawing on Gehrke, note "much modern argumentation …has rested on assumptions that…those who argue must come to the exchange… favoring an oppositional approach to interaction" (p. 157). These scholars suggest, "ideological commitments to competitiveness, individualism, and winning" undermine the ability to achieve "idealized deliberative communities" (p.101). I will return to these claims below, but the important point here is that Western argumentation practices are predominantly built on competitive models. Please also note the solid boundaries around the two upper circles. These solid lines represent a barrier between the predominantly competitive Western culture and collaborative ways of approaching difference. Changing from a competitive approach to a collaborative approach when tensions arise is not a natural move for Westerners. It requires knowledge, skill and practice. Process literacy as I am conceptualizing it, facilitates movement, with intentionality, across competitive and collaborative approaches to discursive differences and cultural tensions primarily in a collaborative direction. Finally, notice the arrows and perforated lines in locations where the three circles overlap.[27] These arrows and perforations represent the flow of rhetorical dynamics from competitive to cooperative ways of interacting through process literacy.

Figure 2 depicts the same three approaches to group interaction in internal coalition communication as does Figure 1, but it does so specifically within the context of internal conflict. Foregrounded in this figure are four distinct communicative models used for conflict situations – debate, dialogue, mediation, and negotiation. The overlapping areas among these three circles represent conflict communication that does not necessarily fall neatly within just one of these circles. For example, the shaded overlapping areas demonstrate that an argumentative approach to conflict can be a collaborative enterprise.

Process Literacy Terms

The following process literacy terms are depicted in Figures 1 and 2, I organize them on three levels: macro-, meso-, and mirco-. As I will explain, macro-level terms refer to communicative genres, meso-level terms refer to rhetorical frameworks, and micro-level terms refer to conflict models. These terms are not intended to be an exhaustive list of process literacy terms. Rather, they are relevant to understanding conceptual aspects of process literacy that I am addressing in this chapter. I will define each term only briefly, because I will elaborate on these concepts in subsequent sections.

Communicative Genres – Macro Level Terms

By *communicative genres*, I am referring to Bakhtin's (1981) broad conception of the term. For Bakhtin, communicative genres are worldviews that influence daily behaviors. Communicative genres carry with them value systems, purposes, and a range of action/responses that are learned during primary socialization. As Morson (1991)

explains, communicative genres from a Bakhtinian perspective are "models for change and central to how change happens" (p. 1087). Using this broadly defined concept, I depict two communicative genres in Figure 1, competitive and collaborative, which I will define next.

Competitive

A *competitive* communicative genre refers to the dominant individualistic and aggressive cultural practices within Western cultural milieu. As Bohm (2003) explains, "the success of a person's point of view" is often rewarded either socially or financially and "the struggle of each idea to dominate is commonly emphasized in most activities in society" (p. 296). This communicative genre adopts confrontational and divisive approaches to conflict, where those who disagree are viewed as "rivals" rather than "resources" (Makau & Marty, 2001 p. 88). The model for change within a competitive communicative genre assumes that aggressive and confrontational challenges to the status quo are efficacious and necessary. This genre subsumes the argumentative rhetorical framework that I have observed in internal coalition communication, which I will discuss below.

Collaborative

By a *collaborative* communicative genre, I am referring to alternative (non-dominant) Western cooperative cultural practices. This communicative genre is similar to what Burke (1959) calls comic and what Doxtader (2000) calls "intersubjective" (p. 339). The orientation of a collaborative communicative genre adopts a premise of

interdependence and mutual respect for others with plural worldviews (Arnett, 2004; Makau & Marty, 2001). Conflict is viewed as an opportunity to make change in mutually agreeable ways (Daniels & Walker, 2001). This communicative genre subsumes two of the three rhetorical frameworks I have observed in RWD's internal coalition communication—invitational and deliberative.

Rhetorical Frameworks – Meso Level Terms

In order to understand how process literacy pivots discourse toward a collaborative communicative genre, it is important to understand what I mean by *rhetorical framework.* Rhetoric is communication within a socio-historic situation with intention. The framework (e.g., the overall style, tone, and content) of rhetoric is shaped by that intention, purpose or *telos*. For example, if the *telos* is to compete, a more aggressive or confrontational approach to the rhetorical situation is likely to ensue. Thus, when I use the term rhetorical framework I am referencing a constellation of rhetorical characteristics that are associated with and influenced by *telos*. Figure 1 depicts three overlapping rhetorical frameworks, each with a unique *telos* that I have observed in internal coalition communication.

Argumentative

Traditionally, an *argumentative* rhetorical framework adopts a win/lose, right/wrong, or judgmental set of assumptions.[28] The *telos* in an argumentative rhetorical framework is to win audience "adherence" or "informed support" (Rieke, Sillars, & Peterson, 1997, p. 4) at the potential expense of someone or something else (losers or

losing propositions). I embed this rhetorical framework within the prevailing competitive communicative genre of Western cultural practices.

Invitational

An *invitational* rhetorical framework adopts a type of curiosity or interest in learning, without the intention of persuading audiences toward a particular stance. The *telos* is to understand (Bone, Griffin, & Scholz, 2008; Foss & Griffin, 1995). Thus rhetors and audiences are in a dialectic relationship, wherein the subject positions of teacher and student shift between them and are shared. This rhetorical framework is subsumed within a collaborative communicative genre.

Deliberative

A *deliberative* rhetorical framework also falls within the collaborative communicative genre. Within a deliberative rhetorical framework, the *telos* is to reach mutual agreements or decisions that address the primary interests involved. The ideal outcome among deliberators is consensus (Ellis, 2012; Gastil, 1993; Habermas, 1984; Makau & Marty, 2001).

Conflict Models – Micro Level Terms

In Figure 2, I locate communicative conflict models within the three rhetorical frameworks described above. Conflict communication models are patterned communicative practices or processes for dealing with conflict. These conflict processes can be initiated within any of the three rhetorical frameworks described above, but each

is located in Figure 2 within the respective rhetorical framework that is most conducive for operationalizing it. Next, I will briefly describe the four relevant conflict models in Figure 2.

Debate

Debate is an argumentative enterprise, wherein rhetors develop opposing arguments and seek to persuade audiences toward judgments that align with their respective conclusions. An argumentative rhetorical framework, with its *telos* of winning, subsumes this practice. This win/lose model is prevalent in Western culture, but as I will explain later it is not the dominant rhetorical framework for best practices in internal coalition communication because the approach includes divisive approaches to conflict (Bohm, 2003; Makau & Marty, 2001; Tannen, 1998).

Dialogue

Dialogue is an amorphous term and models vary. I use dialogue to refer to a process of deep listening in the context of conflict. It involves being fully present, suspending judgment, seeking to understand, being open to letting differences stand, and speaking about or from one's own experience (Bohm, 2003; Hawes, 2003; Kellett & Dalton, 2001; Mindell, 1995; Senge, 1994). Makau and Marty (2001) define it as "a process of communicating **with** (rather than at, to, or for) others and the sharing of a mutual commitment to hear and be heard" (p.46, bold in original). I locate this model for engaging conflict primarily within an invitational rhetorical framework since it entails

mutual respect across difference without acting on the impulse to resolve these differences or to reach agreements.

Mediation

Mediation is a process for peacefully resolving interpersonal, inter-group, inter-organizational, and community based conflicts. The mediator, a specially trained third party who is not vested in the outcome, facilitates this problem-solving process. Mediation is primarily located within a collaborative communicative genre because the *telos* is to reach lasting resolution via mutually beneficial (win/win) participant-driven decisions (Bush & Pope, 2002; Fisher, 2011; Folger & Bush, 2001; Holdbrook, 2010; Kellett & Dalton, 2001; Moore, 1986). Mediation spans the collaborative communicative genre because it typically begins within an invitational rhetorical framework and ends in a deliberative rhetorical framework.

Negotiation

I adopt Leonard Hawes' (personal communication) notion that *negotiation* can be broadly defined as "the art and practice of a learning conversation" (personal conversation). In order to work together, coalition participants learn to negotiate their diverse identities (a cross-cultural form of negotiation) to co-construct a sense of shared power and collectivity. In this context of internal coalition communication, I locate negotiation primarily within a collaborative communicative genre since it ideally involves learning about and grappling with diverse identities in a cooperative manner

(Kellett & Dalton, 2001; Lewicki, Saunders & Minton, 1999; Williams, 1996) across invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks.

Process Literacy and the Collaborative Genre

I argue that the ability to negotiate the complexity of discursive differences and cultural tensions in internal coalition communication while striving to reach agreement on action steps that can be implemented (collectively and individually) requires process literacy. In the case of the RWD, process literacy entails the ability to maintain productive communication at the nexus of argumentative, invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks. An invitational rhetorical framework can account for some of the open and confirming communication climate that I have witnessed in the RWD. However, external exigencies combined with coalition goals create rhetorical situations that beckon a deliberative rhetorical framework – one that opens a space for hashing out disagreements toward mutual decisions. Further, an argumentative rhetorical framework in RWD happens when a participant attempts to persuade the group to adopt his/her point of view or position on an issue. Process literacy facilitates this move from argumentative and invitational rhetorical frameworks toward a deliberative rhetorical framework. The degree of difficulty in accomplishing this varies. For example, in general, it is more challenging to shift from an argumentative to a collaborative genre than the reverse. And it is easier to shift from an invitational rather than an argumentative rhetorical framework to a deliberative mode because the latter shift requires a macro-level leap across communicative genres, whereas the former does not. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier,

the invitational framework is a common pathway for getting from an argumentative to a deliberative rhetorical framework.

Conflict can be messy and complex. As such, debate, dialogue, mediation and negotiation travel across all three of these rhetorical frameworks. In the case of RWD, process literacy allows for some shifts from collaborative to competitive communication genres, but it primarily creates openings where these frameworks and genres overlap and finesses interactions toward a deliberative rhetorical framework in order to ultimately reach collaborative agreements on future courses of action.

To better understand these rhetorical dynamics across communicative genres and rhetorical frameworks, I will review the relevant literature for the meso- and micro- terms defined above and explain the significant ways in which they converge and diverge. In the process, I will review the macro- terms (i.e., competitive and collaborative) and their relationship to process literacy. I will begin with a review of the three rhetorical frameworks.

Traversing Rhetorical Frameworks

In this section, I draw from relevant communication theory to explicate three distinct rhetorical frameworks for negotiating discursive differences and cultural tensions that are inherent in internal coalition communication. While process literacy pivots conflict communication toward a collaborative genre, it allows for cooperative forms of argumentation and prevents the impulse to coerce or force mutual agreements. Thus, process literacy enables participants to fluently traverse three distinct rhetorical

frameworks -- argumentative, invitational and deliberative -- in support of coalition maintenance.

Argumentative Rhetoric

In my model of process literacy, I distinguish an argumentative rhetorical framework from deliberative and invitational rhetorical frameworks by the communicative genre in which it is housed and by *telos* (or purpose). I locate an argumentative rhetorical framework primarily within a competitive communicative genre that is dominant in Western culture (Makau & Marty, 2001). Argumentation "is the communicative process of advancing, supporting, criticizing and modifying claims so that appropriate decisions makers, defined by relevant spheres, may grant or deny adherence" to these claims and conclusions that they support (Rieke et al., 1997, p. 4). Inherent in this definition of argumentation is a *telos* of persuasion – to *win* the informed backing of audiences (e.g., decision makers). As discussed earlier, the style, tone, and content of messages enacted within an argumentative rhetorical framework typically reflects this competitive (win/lose) purpose in Western culture. The *telos* is not consensual decision-making as it is within a deliberative rhetorical framework.

I do not want to create a false dichotomy between argumentation and deliberation, since deliberation uses argumentation as a means for reaching informed, mutual decisions, and argumentation uses deliberation as a means for honing and advancing key claims. For example, Peterson, Peterson and Peterson (2005) suggest "argument- and consensus-based approaches can coexist," (p. 766). For Peterson et al. (2005), argumentation is a communicative process that entails dissent and deliberation. The

primary distinction I want to call attention to, however, is the communicative genre (i.e., the manner) in which dissent is enacted, because when it comes to internal coalition communication, the *approach* taken during the act of dissent is vital to coalition maintenance.

Makau and Marty (2001) distinguish *cooperative* from *adversarial* forms of argumentation in which "people tend to get locked into their positions" as adversaries instead of focusing on the issues, interests and values that underlie the respective positions (p. 84). This distinction is highly relevant to process literacy, which I argue pivots dissent toward a collaborative communicative genre in the context of internal coalition communication. If dissent takes place within a competitive (win/lose) argumentative framework, it risks perpetuating a cycle of conflict among coalition participants, which undermines coalition maintenance. As Makau and Marty (2001) argue, a competitive or adversarial approach to advocacy privileges the advocate's perspective at the expense of others (p. 197). Alternatively, "[c]ooperative argumentation" as Makau and Marty (2001) suggest, "provides the means for reasoned give-and-take on complex and controversial issues" (p. 115). In sum, argumentation can take place within both competitive and collaborative communicative genres.

Turning to Figure 1, there are three overlapping rhetorical frameworks. The upper two are located within a collaborative communicative genre. I have situated an argumentative rhetorical framework below this and primarily within a competitive communicative genre, because competitive discourses dominate the Western social milieu. However, Makau and Marty's (2001) notion of cooperative argumentation falls outside of this competitive communicative genre. Thus, cooperative argumentation is

enacted within a collaborative communicative genre. In Figure 1, this is the upper portion of the sphere labeled "Argumentative Rhetorical Framework" where it overlaps with both the invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks. Similarly, Doxtader (2000) treats these overlapping frameworks in his discussion about the interplay between dissent and consensus. I locate what Doxtader (2000) refers to as "transgressive" forms of rhetoric primarily within the competitive communicative genre or lower portion of the argumentative rhetorical framework (p. 339). I do this because in describing what he calls "the middle of public life" between "transgressive and consensual modes of communication" Doxtader likens the condition of being in the middle as being "caught between disrespect and mutual support" (p. 345). Thus Doxtader's "middle of public life" is located in the overlapping areas between a competitive and a collaborative communicative genre depicted in Figure 1. An invitational rhetorical framework enables movement toward a deliberative rhetorical framework. As such, it is often the route taken to get from a competitive argumentative framework to a collaborative deliberative rhetorical framework (as noted by the flow depicted in Figure 1).

Invitational Rhetoric

Foss and Griffin (1995) introduced the concept of an invitational rhetorical theory that eschews patriarchal impulses to dominate and change others. This rhetorical framework is "an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value and self-determination. Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does" (p. 5). Bone et al. (2008) have responded to a range of criticisms over Foss' and Griffin's

totalizing linkage of traditional rhetorical strategies with coercive forms of persuasion or more violent forms of rhetoric that trespass on personal integrity. In doing so, these authors suggest that invitational rhetoric is "a move toward civility," which they define as a place where "we cannot pretend that we journey alone, that others are unworthy or without voice, or that our view is the only 'right' view" (p. 456-457). The ideal result of invitational rhetoric is the understanding of both issues and the participants, themselves, as they share unique perspectives through listening to one another with a sense of "respect and appreciation" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 5).

Thus, invitational rhetoric opens up a communication climate and fosters a shift from a competitive to a collaborative communicative genre. An open communication climate includes spontaneous, egalitarian, empathic and descriptive communication (Wood, 2007). Within an invitational rhetorical framework, one might ask, "Would you be willing to tell me more about that?" or "How is it that you have come to understand the situation that way?" One might also say, "My experience with the situation has led me to a different perspective." But to move beyond genuine inquiry and understanding of diverse perspectives to an evaluative and selective group process that involves ranking options and decision-making on a collective course of action, falls outside of an invitational rhetorical framework. This is because invitational rhetoric eschews rhetorical moves to persuade and convince audiences about what is better or best.

Finally, an invitational rhetorical framework sets the stage for cooperative problem-solving and conflict resolution. As Foss and Griffin (1995) explain, invitational rhetoric *allows* for the "*development* of interpretations, perspectives, courses of actions, and solutions to problems different from those allowed in traditional models of rhetoric"

(p.16, *italics* added). Thus, as I will demonstrate in the analysis section, in the case of RWD, internal coalition conflict is often met within an invitational rhetorical framework before participants move beyond learning about the diverse perspectives represented in the room toward collaborative decision-making.

Deliberative Rhetoric

In contrast to invitational rhetoric, and as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, a deliberative rhetorical framework engages inventive, suasory, creative, evaluative, and collaborative problem-solving steps toward mutual decisions (Doxtader, 2000; Ellis, 2012; Gastil, 1993; Makau & Marty, 2001; Peterson et al., 2005; Welsh, 2002). Through participant observation, I have found collaboration to be the predominant communicative genre in RWD strategy meetings. During these meetings, participant communication often shifts back and forth between invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks. I have observed that there is a natural progression in this group that begins with invitational rhetoric and ends with deliberative rhetoric, as participants move through agenda items, topic by topic, and arrive at mutual agreements for action steps moving forward.

Doxtader (2000), Goodnight (1982), Makau and Marty (2001), and Welsh (2002) are among the few contemporary rhetorical scholars that explicitly theorize deliberative rhetoric outside of legislative contexts. For Welsh (2002) public deliberation is broader than face-to-face interactions where elected officials creatively interpret and modify "commonly referenced or understood ways of speaking" (p. 690). RWD qualifies as what Makau and Marty (2001) call a specialized "composite deliberative community," because

it includes skilled deliberators with knowledge of the topic at hand and the capability to make reasoned and ethical mutual decisions through cooperative argumentation (p.170).[29] Doxtader (2000) also argues that deliberative spaces are not confined to legislative contexts, but occur in what he calls the middle of public life. Doxtader writes, "the middle of public life appears when individuals, standing between various interests, desires, and discourses, enter into a struggle for recognition" (p. 361). RWD strategy meetings are an example of this space in the middle of public life where deliberative rhetoric includes evaluative appeals and persuasive efforts to influence as well as to problem solve by creatively inventing, combining, and evaluating workable options. As I will demonstrate in the analysis section, process literacy, within a deliberative rhetorical framework, involves patience and the wisdom to stop short of decision-making if a clear pathway forward is not collectively understood. As such, process literacy keeps open a space for on-going dissent between deliberative and argumentative frameworks (see the overlapping area in Figure 1) within a collaborative communicative genre.

This responds to Doxtader's (2000) call to explore rhetorical movement in the middle of public life. Turning back to Figure 2, we might visualize Doxtader's middle of public life in the overlapping elliptically shaped areas of the three rhetorical frameworks, particularly at the nexus (depicted with the darkest shading in the center) where space is common to all three. Here, in this communicative space, held open by process literacy, dissent thrives and pathways toward consensus emerge. This is the space between what Doxtader calls transgressive (competitive) and intersubjective (collaborative) dimensions of the public sphere.

As I have indicated, RWD commonly practices collaborative conflict communication. However, in particularly tense conflict situations, when competitive genres emerge and begin to dominate (think of the common elliptical areas among the three rhetorical frameworks in Figure 1 growing smaller as the bottom circle shifts downward and away from the top two circles), process literacy prevents the attenuation of this space in the middle of public life. In other words, process literacy acts like a ligament that keeps argumentative rhetoric connected to and pivoting toward collaborative rhetoric.

Figuring out how process literacy helps participants manage to collectively and consistently enter this liminal space in the middle of public life and dwell in it, responds to Doxtader's (2000) call for building deliberative rhetorical theory as a space between opposition and agreement. It is a means for determining how dissensus can facilitate consensus. Beyond rhetorical theory, much has been written about the Habermasian influenced term "deliberation." The term is polysemic and scholarship that treats deliberation spans literatures in the realms of political science, public affairs, communication, law, sociology and beyond (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002; Ellis, 2012; Fishkin, 1991, 2011; Gastil, 2000; Gastil & Black, 2007; Gastil, Black, & Moscovitz, 2008; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Gastil, Reedy, Braman, & Kahan, 2007; Levasseur & Carlin, 2001; Maoz & Ellis, 2008; McAfee, 2004; Monnoyer-Smith, 2008; Mutz, 2006; Squires, 2005). Communication scholars Gastil and Black (2007) assert that

> public deliberation, within the broader context of the public sphere, includes both analytic and social processes and provides a unifying conceptual and critical framework for studying nearly the full range of political communication topics…including media and public opinion…and civic and community life. (p.i)

Thus, this case study contributes to public deliberation theory in this realm of political communication that treats participation in civic and community life. It does so by describing process literacy as a best practice for bridging cross-cultural differences toward mutual governance in the context of internal coalition communication.

I will primarily draw from political communication and small/inter-group communication to describe characteristics of deliberation, or the act of deliberating within a collaborative communicative genre and a deliberative rhetorical framework. Ellis (2012) defines deliberation as a type of communication based on democratic fairness with five qualities: (1) argument and reason, (2) fair and equal relationships among participants with genuine listening and respect for the ideas and realities of others, (3) consensus as a *telos* (4) traditional authority and power can be challenged and questioned, and (5) no one group may dominate the interactions. I adopt Ellis' definition of deliberation with help from Gastil (1993) who claims that deliberation entails equal and adequate opportunities to participate in "agenda setting reformulating… and dissenting" (p. 26). Thus, a deliberative rhetorical framework supports communicative speech acts marked by Ellis' notion of democratic fairness with room for dissent, because pressure to reach agreement can silence inarticulate and marginalized interests (Mouffe, 1993; Peterson et al., 2005). Additionally, Ellis' definition of deliberation combined with Gastil's emphases on participant-driven agenda-reformulation and dissent, create a useful heuristic for developing and evaluating deliberative communication processes.

We can see in deliberative rhetoric some overlap with Foss and Griffin's (1995) invitational rhetoric in the concepts of: fairness, equality, and an openness to questioning the status quo, as well as in honoring equality and inclusive participation. But there is a

departure from invitational rhetoric with deliberative rhetoric's underpinnings in argumentation and the motive to reconcile differences or achieve consensus.

In sum, a deliberative rhetorical framework is respectively distinct from argumentative and invitational rhetorical frameworks, because, (1) it steers clear of competitive win/lose orientations, and (2) it seeks mutually acceptable ways to resolve differences. Invitational rhetoric creates an open communication climate in that it invites information sharing and articulation of perspectives. As such, an invitational rhetorical framework is compatible with and sets the stage for a deliberative rhetorical framework – both fall within a collaborative communicative genre. Questions remain, however, "to unravel the puzzle of how public transgression and opposition facilitates dialogue and mutual agreement" (Doxtader, 2000, p. 338). I assert that process literacy enables these shifts between competitive and collaborative communicative genres and suggest that conflict theory can help to illuminate how.

Conflict Theory Informs Process Literacy

Within conflict theory, dialogue, negotiation, and mediation models offer practical ways to negotiate and resolve disputes. These micro-processes are located within a collaborative communicative genre. Each of these micro-processes, which are derived from attendant theories, offers a means for responding to the particular rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968). For example, when the RWD meets to strategize action steps for defeating the aqueduct, the rhetorical situation is constrained by a series of exigencies that drive the agenda. In the RWD meetings, there is almost always a sense of urgency to overcome external obstacles as they emerge or loom in the distance on the long road to

defeating the aqueduct. The rhetorical situation in RWD meetings calls on discourse to assist in determining, collectively, the best opportunities to modify whatever is enabling the potential for the aqueduct to become a reality. In other words, the rhetorical situation in RWD meetings demands collaboration, but conflicts over strategies arise. Process literacy includes having the knowledge and the skill set to operationalize appropriate conflict models in *kairotic* moments across shifting rhetorical frameworks.

Negotiation and Mediation Models

There are four major negotiation/mediation models[30]: (1) distributive, which typically involves divvying up material objects (e.g., Moore, 1986); (2) integrative, which focuses on the underlying principled interests of the disputants (e.g., Fisher, 2011; Kellett & Dalton, 2001); (3) transformative, which emphasizes ways to balance power and relational equality (e.g., Bush & Pope, 2002; Folger & Bush, 2001); and (4) performative, which is an embodied way of working with differences such as eating or walking on the land together (e.g., Holbrook, 2010). The *ideal* outcome of all cooperative forms of negotiation/mediation (especially integrative and transformative) is to reach mutually beneficial agreements among the negotiating parties (Lewicki et al., 2002; Williams, 1996). I have observed that collaborative integrative, and transformative models are predominantly at work during RWD strategy meetings.

These negotiations occur within a collaborative communicative genre across both an invitational rhetorical framework (inviting and maintaining an open communication climate) and a deliberative rhetorical framework (evaluating/reconciling differences, maintaining/improving relationships, and seeking mutually beneficial agreements). What

conflict theory specifically contributes here is a set of pragmatic processual communicative pathways for grappling with differences such that it increases the desire and potential for arriving at mutually beneficial agreements. More specifically, in mediation processes, third parties help participants to mutually develop ground rules, including norms for interacting with one another. *How* questions are framed *matters* because this can affect the openness of the communication climate and the desire or willingness to work collaboratively. In RWD, I have observed these skills applied in response to group conflict, which I attribute to process literacy.

In the analysis section, I will point out specific discursive moves by individuals (with a spotlight on facilitator roles) that operationalize certain aspects of negotiation/mediation models within distinct rhetorical frameworks, as a means to achieve consensual ends. Although consensus is always the best outcome for a deliberative community like RWD, process literacy also includes avoiding the impulse to coerce this outcome. What happens when perspectives remain incommensurate or consensus is nowhere to be found, *and* the disputants *need* to remain in relationship?[31] This is where dialogue theory can help.

Dialogue as a Productive Model for Grappling with Incommensurate Difference

Process literacy entails the wisdom to know when to retreat from the *telos* of a deliberative rhetorical framework that requires consensus, to open space for dissensus, and facilitate dialogue. In RWD meetings, when conflicts over strategies occur, the facilitator will often use invitational rhetoric to encourage dialogue. I locate dialogue, as a communication model, somewhere in-between or in the overlapping areas of

invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks. Dialogue operates within a deliberative rhetorical framework in that it intentionally engages significant and even incommensurate differences (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). But the *telos* in dialogue is more compatible with that of an invitational rhetorical framework because the goal is not to seek mutual agreement; rather, it is to realize shared understandings.

The term "dialogue" is polysemic. I draw on Makau and Marty's (2001) notion of speaking *with* others and Hawes' (2003) theoretical work to define dialogue simply as a communicative response to conflict involving deep listening coupled with *parrhesia*[32] – a form of frank truth telling (p. 182). We can conceive of dialogic moments as rhetorical moments when identities meet, collide and engage. Dialogic interactions can result in the transformation of identities and relationships. As with negotiation/mediation models, to facilitate dialogue, one pays close attention to both the form and function of communicating differences in order to create a conceptual vessel or container in which participants grapple with diverse perspectives *without* striving to reconcile them. Dialogue is a form of communication that entails an open communication climate, with inclusive participation (honoring silence as a form of participation) deep listening, *parrhesia*, and a degree of vulnerability for participants, who might risk higher than normal degrees of self-disclosure supported by a sense of safety within a conceptual container. Process literacy, in *kairotic* situations, facilitates dialogue that can last for hours. Yet, dialogic moments are often emergent and ephemeral. Hawes (2003) defines dialogue as "discourses desire for discipline and transparency" where discourse is granted agency (p. 175). Ephemeral moments are more common during the RWD strategy meetings, but in response to internal conflicts, I have witnessed "transparent" (meta-

communicative openings) and "disciplined" (monitored and enforced) dialogue spanning hours, which I attribute to process literacy within RWD.

Dialogue theory draws from conflict resolution models, but dialogue aims to create openings *without* the purpose of reaching agreement(s). An ideal outcome in dialogic communication includes enhanced understanding of differences among participants and learning experiences that hold the potential to transform ways of thinking, being, and doing. Thus, dialogue operates within an invitational rhetorical framework since the motive is to gain understanding. Dialogue practiced within an invitational rhetorical framework offers *pragmatic* ways to facilitate open communication climates that honor equality, imminent value and self-determination through, for example: (1) talking circles (borrowed from indigenous practices) or circular spatial arrangements that encourage inclusivity; (2) egalitarian speaking processes (e.g., turn-taking, speaking in the first person and de-limiting representation to self-representation); and (3) well-formed (nonjudgmental) questions.

Dialogue theory assumes that multicultural face-to-face interactions can manifest in peaceful relations among groups with a history of conflict or tensions (Kellett & Dalton, 2001). Mindell (1995) describes dialogue as an engagement in heated conflict. Senge (1994) asserts, "Dialogue is a way of helping people to 'see the representative and participatory nature of thought … and [to] make it safe to acknowledge the incoherence in our thought.' *In dialogue people become observers of their own thinking*" (pp. 241-242 *italics* original). Thus, dialogue is compatible with Burke's (1959) comic frame (discussed in the previous chapter). Moreover, dialogue is a means for holding open rhetorical space for dissensus in the middle of public life (Doxtader, 2000). I assert that

process literacy helps to shift competitive rhetorical responses to conflict toward collaborative rhetorical frameworks. Process literacy invites ethical dialogue as a collaborative response to conflict and it fosters movement, when appropriate, toward a deliberative rhetorical framework without the impulse to coerce or force consensus.

In sum, dialogue is a communicative response to conflict that functions to heighten collective awareness of assumptions, (in)coherence and variable perspectives, interpretations, or meanings. Dialogue is a way to map differences without attempting to arrange them hierarchically. Finally, and most importantly, dialogue, through enhanced understanding of diverse perspectives, can illuminate new pathways toward mutual (dis)agreements, while still finding ways to remain in relationship.

In the next section, I will present characteristics of and rhetorical strategies for best practices in process literacy in the context of internal coalition conflict. Additionally, I will select and interpret specific communicative tactics and strategies used by RWD leadership to illuminate how process literacy facilitates shifting across communicative genres and between rhetorical frameworks in response to changing external exigencies in internal coalition maintenance.

A Case Study in Process Literacy

Creating a rhetorical framework conducive to productive internal coalition deliberation within a comic frame hinges on the process literacy of the group. While group process literacy capacity is constituted by the skill sets that individual participants bring and enact during group interactions, process literacy, during internal coalition conflict situations, is dependent on skillful group facilitation. In this chapter, I will focus

on issues of process literacy with a spotlight on group interventions by two key facilitators. Best practices of process literacy integrate facilitation/mediation micro-processes by substantively knowledgeable and trusted (third) parties with formal mediation and facilitation training that can help participants negotiate discursive differences and cultural tensions both during and between meetings. In this analysis, I will highlight three key characteristics of process literacy and three rhetorical strategies. Together, these characteristics and strategies constitute best practices for negotiating discursive difference and cultural tensions across shifting rhetorical frameworks that are crucial to coalition maintenance.

The analysis section unfolds in four parts. First, I begin by describing the conflict situation. I establish the context in which external exigencies catalyze a chain of events that offer a window into best practices of process literacy. Second, I introduce three characteristics (or capacity indicators) of process literacy -- (1) facilitation, (2) mediation, and (3) discursive accommodation -- and two exemplary coalition leaders/facilitators: Rita (a volunteer coordinator and main facilitator/mediator for the RWD) and Ian (an attorney employed by RWD), who are key factors in bringing out RWD's capacity for process literacy.[33] In the third section, I introduce three rhetorical strategies of process literacy used by RWD and demonstrate how they function as best practices in coalition maintenance during conflict situations. The three strategies are: (1) creating ethical guidelines; (2) containing conflict and attending to the need for confidentiality; and (3) keeping communication participatory across communicative genres. In the last section of the analysis, I discuss how a key part of process literacy in internal coalition communication involves understanding the importance of creating and maintaining a

space for the negotiation of discursive differences and cultural tensions between rhetorical frameworks within a collaborative communicative genre.

Troubled Waters in Verdant Valley

In order to understand process literacy in the RWD, it is important to first outline the context of internal conflict over the proposed interstate water compact. [34] Responses to this situation called for finding ways to deliberate across major differences over strategies without allowing a competitive communicative genre to dominate. After I explain the conflict, I will turn to analysis of how process literacy helped accomplish this in subsequent sections.

In late summer of 2009, water bureaucrats from Mountain State and Desert State held a series of promotional meetings for a negotiated two-state compact that allocates specific groundwater rights underlying a basin that straddles the two-state border. Many RWD participants became passionately opposed to this compact, while a few registered support for the compact. The clash between Alonso and Joe over the compact is one example of how the interstate compact became a source of internal conflict within the RWD that, as I will show, required process literacy to move through the dispute.

Alonso is a small business owner in Verdant Valley[35] with a keen sense of humor and his communicative style can be somewhat divisive or edgy at times. He doesn't "take any bullshit" (DC, 01/08/10). He remarked in our interview that the governor of Mountain State would sign the two-state compact "in a New York minute" (or 45 seconds) if it weren't for the legal ruling in favor of RWD's arguments and RWD's public awareness campaign in Mountain State. Alonso doesn't mince words and he often

references his "radar" when he smells a rat. He makes public his opinions in letters to editors and he does not shy away from personalizing his messages. For example, in response to learning that Joe supported the two-state compact, he called Joe's credibility into question in an open, detailed and lengthy email letter addressed to Joe, which he circulated on the RWD listserv. He wrote:

> When some heard your statement re: the [water rights] split and know you are promoting a compact they said[,] "Is he being bought out?" Your reputation in these parts is being challenged. Stand strong Joe: oppose a compact and continue the long untarnished history you have.

Alonso suggests that Joe's *ethos* is at risk if he continues to support the compact. He cautions him, advising him not to cash in, and he implies "you're either with us on this issue or you're against us." This implication involves a step away from a comic frame toward a melodramatic and divisive frame.[36] The open letter from Alonso was perceived by some individuals to be a personal attack on Joe (DC1, 10/16/11). The overall tone of the entire letter created consternation for many RWD participants, who practice maintaining a collaborative communicative atmosphere within RWD. Joe informed me about this during our interview:

> Deb: I think that was my first entree into the [coalition]. I came to a meeting where Ian was talking with the group and counseling the group on how to negotiate or deal with conflict and keep it inside the [coalition] as opposed to…putting out emails that might get picked up by others.
> Joe:[…]Rita worried that I was being hurt by the disagreement, and she did disagree with me […] I mean it didn't bother me that much. I disagreed on issues but not what they were doing. And they had real legitimacy as to the position they [had] that was different than mine. […]You see, I had the feeling they mostly just, if they totally disagree with me, most of them just shook their head and say, "I thought he was smarter than that. But I disagree with him and I think he's being dumb on that. But I mean that don't, I don't think he is a really bad guy." I didn't get that feeling with about one exception.
> Deb: Okay.

> Joe: I didn't have quite the status after that but that's okay. I don't need the status. [laughing] I have had too much status; I mean people give me way more credit than I'm worth a lot of times.
> Deb: [laughing] You are funny, Joe. So that is really the only time you can remember being conflicted or at cross-purposes with some of the [coalition] members?
> Joe: Anything that had any impact. I mean it was legitimate on both of our sides.
> Deb: Okay, so how would you say that others dealt with that situation? It sounds like you were getting support from people that maybe disagreed with you […]
> Joe: Ian was doing that. Rita was doing that. Even Lily, and others. A whole bunch of 'em were getting upset, that I was wrong, but everybody was being mad at me 'cuz I was wrong.
> Deb: Yeah so it was like how do we manage these differences in a way that will still be supportive?
> Joe: […] They were a lot more worried about me getting hurt than I did. (DC1, 10/16/11)

Above, Joe emphasizes that his support for the two-state compact caused a conflict among RWD participants and that even though there was strong disagreement over this issues, Rita, Ian, Lily "and others" made it a point to try to separate their judgment of Joe, as a person, from Joe's position on the interstate agreement. Joe indicates that his status dropped a bit, but that people didn't judge him as a "bad guy," except for one unnamed individual. This outcome helps to demonstrate RWD's process literacy and practice as a collaborative deliberative community.

In sum, Alonso's letter, along with other rumors circulating within the group,[37] precipitated a call, within RWD, to adopt ethical guidelines. I will offer the content of these guidelines in the section on best practices. Alonso's strident position and willingness to "call out" Joe in front of his peers was perceived by some members of RWD as a personal attack on Joe that threatened to foreclose the opportunity to continue exploring options for mutual gain in collaboration with Joe, or anyone else that might take a favorable view of the two-state compact. The old adage, "united we stand, divided we fall" comes to mind.

Three Characteristics of Process Literacy

The capacity for process literacy in a system depends on the collective capacity of the actors that constitute the communicative system of analysis, in this case the capacities of RWD strategy meeting participants. I argue that the RWD coalition has a high degree of process literacy, not the least of which is related to the skill sets of the individuals involved in the organization, many of whom are knowledgeable activists that worked together on an antinuclear campaign in the 1980s. Having made this claim, I want to emphasize that skilled intervention in the form of facilitation, during highly controversial situations, is fundamental to bringing out the process literacy of the group.

In other words, skilled third-party facilitation is a form of leadership that functions to sustain and build capacity for process literacy. I will highlight aspects of process literacy, used by leaders in RWD, by primarily drawing from two individuals within the group: Rita and Ian, who regularly practice process literacy in the role of third party facilitators during and between strategy sessions. Neither of these individuals are "neutral" coalition participants. However, Rita (the primary facilitator) and Ian (the lead attorney) frequently step outside of substantive discussions to meta-communicate with participants.

During my interview with Rita, she spoke about her professional and academic interests in negotiating environmental conflict. "Okay, well, that [environmental conflict] was the reason I went to planning school. And I did an internship with environmental mediation" (DC6, 11/09/11). Thus, Rita has some background in third party processes. Ian has a winning track record in arguing court cases for RWD (within a competitive genre and an argumentative rhetorical framework), and he also knows how to fluently

shift from a competitive to a collaborative communicative genre. In my interview with Ian, he noted his perspective on this third-party orientation: "Yeah … I kind of try and take my cues or fit myself in around what Rita or Rita and Jamie and Lily or whoever else may be doing that [facilitating] more overtly in a lead role" (DC9, 11/23/11). From this excerpt, we can see that there are facilitators, beyond Rita, within the group and that Ian views himself in a supportive co-facilitation role. From his seat, as a legal counselor and RWD participant, he strives to support Rita or others who might be facilitating, either formally in her absence or informally in the subject position of a co-facilitator participant. He works with Rita and he tries to "fit" himself "in around" what the primary facilitator is doing. Thus, Ian is aware of, he takes cues from, and he molds himself or accommodates communicative processes that support facilitation during the RWD strategy meetings. His awareness of this role is evidence of his ability to support process literacy in RWD. In sum, both of these RWD leaders regularly employ facilitative strategies to sustain and augment the process literacy of the group.

Facilitation

In the small group literature, facilitation is characterized as "intervention" (Schultz, 1999, p. 389). Drawing from Daniels and Walker (2001), I define facilitation as the practice of employing communicative strategies to foster participatory communication toward collectively derived group goals. "Facilitators use many of the same techniques as mediators, but in mediation processes agreement is a primary goal" (p.178). Third parties (or "neutral"[38] facilitators/ mediators) concurrently track communicative interactions on three levels: processual, substantive, and relational

(Kaner, 2007; Daniels & Walker, 2001). Facilitation within a collaborative communicative genre utilizes a power-to style of leadership - where substantive ideas and decisions flow from the bottom-up and through a group of participants - as opposed to a power-over leadership style that dictates action from the top down. In the case of RWD, all of the meetings are facilitated. The formal role of facilitator is shared among a handful of individuals, and Rita is the primary facilitator, but this does not preclude others from co-facilitating in an informal way.

The following interview excerpt establishes Rita's awareness of the importance of these third party skills, her power-to style as a leader, and her perspective that the purpose of facilitating meetings is to help willing participants engage in productive communication and accomplish a series of agenda topics within finite time constraints toward mutual decisions (Boulding, 1989; Conrad & Poole, 2012; Rothwell & Arthur, 2012). When all else fails, from her perspective, the guiding principle is to preserve communicative functionality at a *relational* level. Her uncanny ability to facilitate these communicative feats across shifting rhetorical frameworks informed by her conflict training, during and in between RWD strategy sessions, is exemplary of best practices in process literacy:

> Deb: I'm just so interested in how you came into that [facilitator] role.
> Rita: Heh! Well, it happened because nobody else wanted to do it. [laughing] And so I said, "Well, okay, we have got to get through this meeting and we need to cover *these* topics." And so I just started and I've never quit.
> Deb: So you just kind of did it *ad hoc* for a while and facilitated yourselves until it became clear
> Rita: Yeah, [Jamie] did some facilitation, [Henry] did some facilitation, [Lily] tried to run meetings and eeehhhhh, to me it was, [pause] I have to say it was a little painful at times to *sit* through because I felt like we weren't really getting some of the stuff we need to get to. Now I know that others feel that *I* do not get to the point that we need to get to sometimes too, and I'm promptly reminded and happy to accept that criticism and get it done.

> Deb: Yeah, I've observed there is some facilitation from within the group as well.
> Rita: Absolutely.
> Deb: But you are in that primary, ah, role and yet you can still participate, right?
> Rita: To some degree. Yeah, and I, but I try not to interject too much of my own feeling into it, because I really feel like the group needs to come to that decision as a group, not because I say it or anybody else says it. It needs to be a mutual decision. […] And then there are some times when we *just have to grind out* something on a particular topic, ah and I'm thinking of the [two-state] compact. I mean we've discussed it repetitively and there still is no agreement, but um we just decided [Joe] has to do what [Joe] has to do to protect his interests. And the rest of us will do what we have to do. And [Fred and Betty] and [Dave] and um the [Walkers] and other folks have very strong opinions and they make them known to the Mountain State side of government. And frankly, it works!
> Deb: So in that case you didn't have to come to a position as an organization.
> Rita: No. No. No. Well we opted not to because we knew we were not going to have agreement.
> Deb: Who is the decision-making body? Is it the core group that I have been observing?
> Rita: Yes. […] You have been witness to a lot of the direction where we go. Um and what we do and what we say and what our messages are. (DC6, 11/09/11)

Thus, for Rita, her role, functioning as a lead facilitator, emerged and facilitation means running a meeting in a manner that enables the group to move toward collaborative decisions that emerge without anyone person dictating outcomes (Fisher, 1980).

Collaborative decisions require process literacy to facilitate internal disputes across shifting rhetorical situations that are often driven by external exigencies (e.g., the two-state compact). It was a bit "painful" for Rita when the group did not accomplish getting to certain "points" or "policy decisions." To quiet her pain, she began using her skills to facilitate the group's ability to achieve strategy-meeting objectives. Her remarks reveal awareness, on her part, of the criticality of facilitation to efficaciously move a communicative process along as a separate role from weighing in on issues substantively. Rita discloses that she occasionally does insert her "feelings" into the RWD group discussions as a participant, but she emphasizes that this is not the norm for her when she is functioning as the primary group facilitator. As Rita also points out, while mutual

decisions are the goal of these strategy meetings, this is not always possible, as in the case with the proposed two-state compact. Functionality, then, is a pragmatic default mechanism as is reflected in Rita's remarks, "And frankly, it works!" Repetitive discussions, as she explains, resulted in RWD participants agreeing to disagree on the matter while preserving relationships with the option for individual (non-RWD representational) activism. Thus, when mutual agreements are not a viable option in internal coalition communication, relational functionality becomes salient. This involves finding ways to accommodate the irreconcilable differences of others. In short, facilitation is a key skill set in process literacy within the context of coalition communication, because it ensures that attention is being paid to processual and relational aspects of conflict communication within a collaborative communicative genre, not just the substantive ones.

Mediation

Having the capacity to mediate disputes among coalition participants is another characteristic of process literacy. Mediation, as a dispute resolution process, is a democratic, participant-driven communication process with voluntary participant disputants using the help of a third-party (i.e., the mediator) to identify and reach mutually beneficial agreement(s) between or among the disputing parties. Daniels & Walker (2001) define it as "an intervention by a neutral and impartial party into an existing dispute in order to facilitate joint decision-making (integrative) negotiation" (p.178). Mediators and facilitators use a number of over-lapping skill sets to help people work through communicative tensions. One way to think about distinctions between the

two is scale. Facilitation involves helping groups (from small to large) achieve mutual goals. Conflicts might arise in this process that require mediation. Mediation entails a small group of disputing parties - often only two. The primary purpose of a formal mediation process is to help disputants resolve a conflict that they have not been able to resolve on their own accord. The content of a mediation session is held in confidence by the mediator and the process assumes good faith participation by all.

Recall that Rita has some background in environmental mediation. In an interview with Rita, she distinguished competitive conflict communication models within an argumentative rhetorical framework from mediation: "It's to win, it's not to mediate…Attorneys get paid to win" (DC6, 11/09/11). Further, Rita explained a kind of shuttle diplomacy process that she uses in between strategy sessions, as needed:

> If there is an issue between two people, often times I do some mediation there. And I'll just talk to them - see what their concerns are - and then I'll talk to the other side and say, "Okay, what's going on? What are your concerns? What are you talking about? Have you thought about?"…And then go back to the other party and say, "Well, what do you think about this? And how do you do this? And what would you do in this situation?" And then you go back. I mean it's a back and forth situation. (DC6, 11/09/11)

This type of shuttle diplomacy is common to distributive bargaining and can be used within integrative-deliberative mediation models, when parties cannot be (for varying strategic or logistical reasons) in the same room. The fact that Rita revealed to me that she does some mediation in between strategy meetings is evidence that, occasionally, there are participant disputes that (in her estimation) call for third party intervention to keep the peace among RWD core participants. This is not to say that others are not capable of mediating their own disputes. For example, Dave reflected on ways that he deals with his own conflicts within RWD:

> Sometimes we can get on each other's nerves, just because we have different styles and we are different people, we see things differently, we can rub each other wrong […], but that - that's really fairly rare, ah I think we genuinely truly appreciate one another and care for one another as friends and that we have this friendship that lasts beyond this work. And that is fortunate […] I think that, in the end, that carries us through, um even though we may disagree and sometimes, and sometimes disagree rather strenuously, but, um by and large it's been pretty damned easy to communicate amongst each other in this group. We give each other a lot of space, I think, and ah partly that's ah a matter of age and experience. We are seasoned.[…] We sometimes get into some misunderstandings because we are communicating long distance, either by phone or by email. […]I like to push it as far as we think we can push it and stir it up. Um, that's just my style. It doesn't mean I can't be diplomatic. It's just it, sometimes, you know, I want to see how far we can go with this.[…] I can sense when I've gone too far. […] they ah will raise complications and I usually take that as a caution sign. You know, slow down, and I think we diffuse those sorts of situations collectively with humor. You know, okay, I'm going to push this, but I'm not going to hang my ego on it, either. You know it's, it's okay, […] it's not worth breaking with people over. (DC5, 10/18/11)

Later on during this same interview with Dave, he told me that when he is in conflict with someone, he typically grants that person some "time" and "space" before directly communicating about the disagreement with his conflict partner (10/18/11). Thus, Dave mediates his own conflicts, using time and space (and humor) as tools to help ease the tension. He describes RWD as a group with collective emotional maturity ("age and experience") and emphasizes that the ability to set aside one's "ego" is key to keeping interactions in internal coalition communication within a collaborative communicative genre – one that privileges relationships over the impulse to persuade, to be right or to win ("it's not worth breaking with people over"). Moreover, Dave claims, "By and large it's been pretty damned easy to communicate amongst each other in this group." Thus Dave's ability to deal with cultural tensions and discursive differences is facilitated by others' abilities to do the same.

In summary, having the capacity to (self-)mediate disputes between or among participants in internal coalition communication is key to process literacy, because these skill sets function to keep coalition conflict communication between strategy meetings within a collaborative communicative genre. I will now turn to the third and last characteristic of process literacy that I will spotlight in this chapter.

Discursive Accommodation

A multitude of verbal and nonverbal messages are at work in cross-cultural communication processes and meaning-making activities within coalitions. Having an awareness of unique cultural practices and making accommodations that respect these differences enables a rhetor to build rapport across cultural divides by avoiding certain practices that might be perceived by audience members as culturally offensive. This is what I am calling *discursive accommodation* - another capacity indicator of process literacy. Discursive accommodation is akin to what Makau and Marty call "critical self-awareness." "People who practice critical self-awareness … are responsive to how their identities might be perceived in a particular dialogue" (p.57).[39]

Ian suggests that women in RWD practice discursive accommodation more than the men do:

> I think the women have a more, I don't know, I'm trying to think about communication. I don't want to be too facile about this. But when I think other than Lily, I think OK Jamie, Rita, Nancy, Betty, Sally, Sarah - there are others too. They communicate in a sort of more mild and moderate way and they seem pretty focused on the folks in the [coalition] and communicating in a way that I don't know, that is capable of being heard by the other people and maybe is not as pushy or I don't know. These are all strong people and I don't think that they are unwilling to be assertive although I think that Betty is often not very assertive. (11/23/11)

However, men practice discursive accommodation, too. Recall David's self-described activist style: "I like to push it as far as we think we can push it and stir it up," and his assertion that this can create tensions with other participants who are less inclined (or who identify more closely with the status quo). When David senses that he has gone as far as he can go, he tells himself to "slow down." In these moments he claims, "I think we diffuse those sorts of situations collectively with humor," (as I have explicated in the previous chapter). The point I wish to make here, though, is that Dave consciously accommodates other cultural orientations using tempo (pace) and time (chronology), a form of discursive accommodation. This is a method for signaling to others that he is willing to back off his activist inclinations, because advocating more radical approaches to block the aqueduct would violate the cultural norms of RWD participants, who identify more closely with mainstream values. By slowing down his impulse to advocate ("stir the pot"), Dave is signaling to others that he respects their more conservative worldview and that he will not "push it" to the point that he will become a threat or a liability to them as RWD participants.

Ian also applies these skills to negotiate discursive differences and cultural tensions. In the next excerpt, Ian reflects on discursive accommodations that he makes in order to reach out to and maintain connections with mainstream and more conservative audiences within the broader RWD coalition, but beyond the main core group of participants:

> I mean I am going to be behaving like the kid that my parents raised in the 60's and 70's who is quite familiar with deferential language or traditional forms of address. I talk about them [issues] in a way that doesn't assume as much in terms of the um I guess it doesn't assume too much about criticisms or critical perception of [e.g.,] state institutions - the state engineer - the way the system works. I think I couch a lot of the discussion in a framework, a verbal and

> conceptual framework that is less likely to offend people who might generally not want to question the system, so to speak. (DC9, 11/22/11)

Herein, Ian discusses discursive strategies that he uses to accommodate the interests and perspectives of individual audience members beyond the core group of active coalition participants, who identify with the status quo and who would not be comfortable affiliating with others within RWD that are overtly critical of "state institutions." He takes into account the form, style, and content of his speech acts and he is careful about assumptions that his interlocutors might hold. In doing so, he adjusts his manner of speaking toward more formal, "deferential" and "traditional forms of address." He imagines how RWD, as an organization, might be perceived from his interlocutor's viewpoint - from the perspective of a rural conservative – e.g., a western rancher. This communicative accommodation brings to mind the well-known saying, "The medium is the message" (McLuhan & Fiore, 2005).

Ian's effort to reduce the noise that might interfere with the content of his messages is a sign of process literacy. He adjusts his discourse so as to disseminate the content of his messages with as little process noise or cognitive interference as possible. Ian's awareness of discursive accommodation to bridge cultural gaps is a sign of process literacy. Moreover, discursive accommodation to negotiate cultural tensions helps to maintain a comic frame. As Burke (1959) puts it, the comic frame "might provide important cues for the composition of one's life, which demands accommodation to the structure of others' lives" (pp. 173-174).

In the following excerpt, Ian reveals the importance of accommodating discursive differences and cultural tensions toward coalition maintenance.

> Deb: I don‘t mean to be boiling this down to just political ideology but is [Rita] working with people that are more strident on the environmental side to help moderate their thinking about how to communicate with people that are more, you know, traditional and conservative?
> Ian: I think she does do that but I don't think it is as simple a division as that. Because I think [Rita] has a long history of connecting with and doing the same kind of thing that I do. I don't really, we're not doing it together so I don't know what she is doing, but she is very good. She is the person I chiefly see as maybe doing some of the same kind of sensitive communication that I do with the conservative rural communities… I am no authority….not trying to be self-referential or self-complimentary, but I do know more about how I communicate with these groups than how other people do it. I'm pretty sure [Rita's] quite good at it as well. But, so there is a tension there that I don't think is a problematic tension, but it sure is there in the sense that if we were inattentive to it, we could lose those people very quickly, I think. (11/22/11)

From Ian's perspective, rhetorical situations arise in coalition communication, which require discursive accommodations in order to retain coalition support within certain community sectors. Thus, the capacity for discursive accommodation is central to coalition maintenance. Without the capacity to attend to these kinds of communicative sensitivities, RWD "could lose […] people very quickly" in (rural) community sectors.

During an interview, Jamie also underscored the practice of discursive accommodation among coalition participants:

> Jamie: I think people tend to be a bit more deferential in order to make sure that we get through the day and we get through the work. And ah frankly, I don't, I haven't seen a whole lot of in your face confrontation about things. It's more, you know, when you've got - when you've got Goliath looking over your shoulder all the time, um, you know the David's don't actually bicker amongst themselves too much, they divvy up the rocks and try to talk about what they are going to do next.
> Deb: Yeah it makes sense […]
> Jamie: Um I want to go back to the previous question for a minute.
> Deb: Okay
> Jamie: And say that because it is a diverse coalition, I think that everybody has to be, to make it work, everybody has to be especially considerate of others […] And they know that they just parked their issue, their gun, their bow and arrow, their um combine or harvester at the door. And so, they - they know that this is a fragile process and they are extra aware that when you get avid environmentalists and avid ranchers, and avid farmers and Indians in the same room, you have to be

> a little careful. You have to be deferential. You have to be respectful. And you have to give people the benefit of the doubt. And I really think we do for the most part. And I think most of the times when there is eye rolling, it is just part of being a family. Oh there they go again. (DC7, 11/09/11)

Although a common enemy ("Goliath") unites the coalition, the process of "divvying up the rocks" (deliberating what to do about "Goliath") is a fragile process that requires discursive accommodation - being "careful," "respectful," and "deferential." This "fragile process" of deliberating next steps, requires symbolically parking one's "issue," identity marker or defense mechanism (e.g., "gun," "bow and arrow," "combine" or "harvester") at the door. This implies that for deliberation to be productive there is a need to create some distance between participant egos and the substantive issues being deliberated by the group. Thus, discursive accommodation is fundamental to process literacy because it helps to pivot cross-cultural deliberation toward a collaborative communicative genre. It does so as a sign of self-reflexivity and mutual respect.

In sum, the capacity for process literacy is constituted by the collective capabilities or skill sets that enable quality group facilitation, dispute mediation and discursive accommodation across cultural tensions, which function to keep communication within a collaborative communicative genre in internal coalition communication. Rita and Ian are exemplary, because of their formal training, which heightens their awareness and self-reflexivity about communication as a process. As such, these individuals bring out process literacy in RWD. But formal training is not a requirement of process literacy, as David points out. The age and experience levels of these "seasoned" rural water defenders has much to do with their collective skill sets that they bring to the meetings and practice as they collaboratively deliberate strategies. In the next section, I will highlight three best practices in process literacy within this context of

an ideal composite deliberative community (or "family") as Jamie put it.

Three Rhetorical Strategies as Best Practice in Process Literacy

The three rhetorical strategies as best practices in process literacy and coalition maintenance, that I will identify and describe are: (1) creating ethical guidelines; (2) containing conflict and attending to the need for confidentiality; and (3) keeping communication participatory across rhetorical frameworks and relevant communicative genres. I will use a series of examples from my field research to show how these particular process literacy strategies can enable coalition participants to negotiate discursive differences and cultural tensions within a collaborative communicative genre without the impulse to coerce consensus.

The proposed two-state compact presented an external exigency that drove a number of rhetorical situations in RWD meetings. In this next series of examples, I highlight rhetorical strategies that are practiced by RWD participants and help to keep a space open for on-going collective and collaborative RWD work in the wake of internal turmoil over the proposed two-state compact.

Creating Ethical Guidelines

Creating ethical guidelines for keeping the peace is a strategy for maintaining unity and cohesion among participants when conflicts erupt. Recall the turmoil that occurred after Alonso sent the open email letter to Joe questioning his ethics. Some RWD participants perceived the tone, content, and style of the letter as confrontational, a shift toward an argumentative rhetorical framework as Joe described above. It specifically

questioned the integrity of an active RWD participant. In response to the email and to other rumors that were circulating in Verdant Valley, RWD coordinators proposed a set of ethical guidelines, which are also commonly referred to as ground rules among third party practitioners. Developing ground rules collaboratively is a best practice in mediation (Folger & Bush, 2001) and in the facilitation of public disputes (Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988). Thus, collaboratively developing ethical guidelines is an application of best practices for dispute resolution within the context of internal coalition conflict communication.

I have selected the Alonso and Joe conflict scenario along with the subsequently proposed ground rules as an example of keeping the peace because this moment in RWD history is exemplary of the process literacy within the entire group. I will now describe the context in which the guidelines (or ground rules) emerged.

Lily facilitated this RWD meeting because Rita was absent. After a round of introductions and celebratory comments by Lily, Ian gave a substantial (approximately 15- to 20- minute) presentation that I interpret as an appeal and rationale for containing conflict within the boundaries of the coalition. He suggested that problems should be taken directly to the individuals involved and explained the importance of refraining from personal attacks to keep unity and peace among the group. “Be tough on the issues, not on the person with whom you disagree,” he coached. During this time, Lily captured the essence of Ian’s remarks on wall notes. When Ian finished his remarks, Lily opened up the floor and asked for input from the group.[40] Subsequently, the group adopted the draft ethical principles (previously circulated by email several days in advance of the meeting on page three of the agenda) with two modifications that emerged from the discussion.

The word “code” was changed to “guidelines” and the word “penalties” was changed to “responses.”[41]

The initial draft of the ground rules read as follows:

Draft Code of Ethics

(Will probably [be] assigned to a committee if discussion goes beyond 15 minutes.)

Stick to the Issues: [RWD] is an issues oriented [coalition] of many organizations and individuals, all of which or who[] have personal opinions that are respected. [RWD] strongly affirms that it will not allow or accept any personal attacks of any kind against any person. Personal attacks may result in penalties. We will deal in issues only.

We will:
1. Always work towards common ground within the group.
2. Respect similarities and differences.
3. When speaking, always remember that our words are attributed to each of us personally AND the [Coalition].

Confidentiality. Since our group develops its own strategies, legal tactics [that] are subject to client/attorney relations, and information, spreading this through email, letters, reports or other form[s] of communication may jeopardize our activities. Confidentiality is crucial. Breaches caused by unapproved sharing of information outside the [coalition] may also result in penalties.

Penalties: Should a breach of either code or policy occur, the RWD Board will take one or more of the following actions:
Possible penalties:
1. Warning that person is beyond the limits of acceptability
2. Removal from the listserv or
3. Removal from the "trusted" list/ability to post on listserv
4. Formal letter stating that a person is no longer part of the [coalition] (3 strikes and you're out!!)

In short, the guidelines call for refraining from personal attacks (i.e., attending to relational concerns to keep the peace), working toward common ground, respecting similarities and differences, thoughtfully representing the coalition, and maintaining

confidentiality with sanctions for those that do not follow these guidelines. This focus on collective boundaries for the process of interacting during conflict situations is an example of a "metadiscussion," which Schultz (1999) defines as "an intervention process designed to confront barriers that prevent groups from achieving effective performance by focusing on the deficiencies members perceive to be thwarting the group's work…while ruling discussion of members' personalities to be out of bounds." (p. 387). The groups' willingness to take the time to collaboratively meta-communicate about boundaries during conflict communication is evidence of process literacy within RWD. Moreover, this sort of intervention is a best practice in internal coalition maintenance, because it functions to keep communication productive and within a collaborative communicative genre, while opening a space for dissensus. In this case, Lily facilitated a collaborative group discussion that resulted in a few modifications to soften some of the language in the draft code of ethics.

Additionally, changes to the language between the draft email agenda that was circulated to RWD strategy meeting participants for feedback and the final version of the agenda caught my eye at the meeting. The addition read, "[T]his is not intended to be censorship on ideas, only personally directed attacks. That's how we reach the best decisions." I assert that this addition to the final agenda demonstrates an awareness in RWD of the tendency to silence participation and flatten differences that can come with censorship and overtures for civility. This language clarifies the motive for proposing ethical guidelines. As such, it is an example of transparency and discipline within a collaborative communicative genre - a genre that accommodates issue-focused criticism in a safe, bounded and participatory communication climate. I will turn to confidentiality

and participation oriented process literacy practices in subsequent sections, but I will first elaborate on how these RWD guidelines that surfaced in response to internal conflict function to shift interactions toward a collaborative communicative genre.

Recall the amended text for the final agenda: “That’s how we reach the best decisions.” Separating people from issues is a conflict resolution strategy developed in the realm of integrative or principled negotiation (Fisher, 2011). This division opens spaces to attend to relationships, as is the focus in transformative mediation models (Folger & Bush, 2001). It enables one to be tough on ideas and issues while taking care not to denigrate the messengers. This impulse to decouple (if possible) substance and subject (or rhetor and ideological or symbolic utterances) is a discursive move that parallels distinctions between comic and melodramatic frames discussed in the chapter on humor.

Within a comic frame, perpetrators are granted the benefit of the doubt. At worst, they are mistaken or misguided and their reform remains a viable possibility. Within a melodramatic frame, reform for perpetrators is out of the question. We can see evidence of this comic frame in the “responses” section of the ethical ”guidelines” adopted by the group during this meeting. It includes initial warnings and staged sanctions for perpetrators before revoking privileges that enable information access and dissemination within the coalition. Put another way, a pattern of repeat offenses is required before full sanctions and exclusion from participation within the coalition takes place.

A long time resident in Dry Gulch Basin (a metaphorical ground zero for the aqueduct project) and RWD participant, Sarah, describes this benefit of the doubt as “courtesy” - a rural cultural practice. In so doing she reveals her capacity for process

literacy within a comic frame:

> Deb: So there was a shaking down period as to who was in the fight for real?
> Sarah: Yeah. […] I think people had to figure out how they felt. And that was partly because Gordon kept turning up and sweet-talking about what a good deal this was going to be. He was solicitous and a good sales person and also passionate about his cause. And so it took a while for people to figure out if they could afford to oppose it.
> Deb: uh hm
> Sarah: And hardly anybody out here is rich, and so most people had to think about that pretty hard. You know. So as I recall it took quite a while and then there would be stories about certain officials or local politicians having secret meetings with UWD. And it's pretty hard to keep things quiet in this territory [laughing]. I mean if a bunch of guys, and I mean everybody knows who they are, and suddenly they are congregating at somebody's ranch - there is no way to keep that a secret. [laughing more].
> Deb: Fascinating process.
> Sarah: And part of that process is a kind of rural courtesy. I mean you don't go around ratting on people.
> Deb: Right.
> Sarah: Not trying to tell someone else what they should do or judging them for that matter. So a lot of real ah uh courtesy was involved in, uh the plot development. So in whatever direction people were going, it took a while to settle out.
> Deb: There were a lot of dilemmas as you pointed out.
> Sarah: […]Well it's a given you know that it's a tough life and - and you cooperate where you can, but you're also, I don't know that the competition gets articulated very much, but it's the foundation […] That's why we killed all those Indians. Competition. I am thoroughly convinced that it is an inhuman concept. […] It's the opposite.
> Deb: It's learned? When you say inhuman?
> Sarah: Well, it's overlaid and introduced, where natural relationship is love and delight. You know in these amazing creatures that human beings are and all the *marvelous* fun that you can get up together that is inventing things, and doing things, and making things happen! All that entrepreneur[ship] that has a dollar sign attached to it along the way, but it's fun - designing or fixing an automobile. It's fun. (10/16/11)

Thus, for Sarah, a collaborative genre is naturally human and a competitive worldview is "overlaid and introduced" or socially constructed. Not only is it "inhuman" from her perspective, it is the motive behind the colonization and the death and destruction of indigenous peoples. She underscores the temptations for opportunism (cashing-in or

selling-out) within a capitalistic system in her comment "so it took a while for people to figure out if they could afford to oppose it [the aqueduct-related land acquisition offers from UWD interests]." Further, "courtesy" as she put it, involves abstaining from judging others and telling them what to do. Within this comic frame and collaborative communicative genre, however, confidentiality remains a major concern. As Sarah points out, secret meetings are hard to keep secret in sparsely populated rural landscapes.

Containing Conflict and Attending to the Need for Confidentiality

Confidentiality is featured in the ethical guidelines adopted by RWD coalition participants:

> Confidentiality. Since our group develops its own strategies, legal tactics [that] are subject to client/attorney relations, and information, spreading this through email, letters, reports or other form[s] of communication may jeopardize our activities. Confidentiality is crucial. Breaches caused by unapproved sharing of information outside the [Coalition] may also result in penalties.

A recurring appeal for confidentiality is a second important strategy in process literacy which is crucial to coalition maintenance, because, over time and absent breaches in confidentiality, mutual trust among disparate actors increases, which fosters the mutual sharing of valuable sensitive information. I know this from first hand experience. I attended RWD strategy meetings for 2 years before RWD participants were willing to grant me permission to use my field notes for analysis. This occurred a year and a half after I disclosed my opposition to the aqueduct proposal. Trust takes time and the specter of possible code violations remains a constant concern at RWD meetings, especially when there are new faces in the room. The inherent risks are enough to warrant the recurring appeal for confidentiality as a best practice in process literacy. Within these

ethical guidelines adopted by the group (above), the appeal for confidentiality is marked as "crucial." The guidelines bar all unapproved "breaches" or "forms of communication" that might "jeopardize" RWD activities.[42]

"Remember, what happens [here], stays [here]!" Rita exclaims, citing a popular phrase indicating confidentiality. Verdant Valley is the preferred location for the strategy meetings, but occasionally the venue changes location to accommodate those who live further south. During one such meeting, Rita reminded the group that all of the strategies discussed in the meetings are confidential and she suggested that any sensitive communications should indicate the word "confidential" in all capital letters up front in emails and in email subject lines. Moreover, on the agenda, right after the word: "Introductions," was the following phrase: "Reminder of <u>what happens here, stays here</u>" (01/09/10). Alex, a participant consultant for RWD stressed this practice in an interview:

> There have definitely been arguments around strategy and there have also been arguments around how public we go with things. And so there have been people that we haven't wanted to talk about other things in front of just because we might find it in the press, and it was information that wasn't yet to be found in the press, or there would be someone involved who was asked to no longer be involved because he was constantly challenging everything strategy wise, he was just constantly challenging and constantly requiring justification for taking this strategy. (DC8, 11/10/11)

Thus, Alex asserts that sensitive topics – those that are not ready for "public" consumption - are only discussed in front of participants that regular RWD core participants trust. Additionally, criticism during deliberation is normal, but when it recurs to the point that it becomes circular and impedes the ability for the group to move forward, or there is fear that someone might go public with sensitive information, "these lone wolf types," as Ian referenced them in an interview, either stop being invited to the meetings or are "asked to no longer be involved," per Alex. Other interviewees alluded to

this, but Ian and Rita were the most comfortable sharing information with me about these situations, perhaps because of their formal training in conflict communication. For example, Ian suggests that, historically, men tend to be less inclined toward process literacy than women in the group:

> But other than some outside women who really meddled in a very corrosive way early on, I don't think of the women as being the generators of real traumatic conflict. I think of OK Alonso, or Brian or Kevin - these kind of crazy lone wolf people. People who disrupt, who get aggressive in terms of trying to push a particular course of action or way of talking about things or communicating with the outside world that other people are uncomfortable with. (11/23/11)

In my interview with Rita, she spoke about the complexity of the intersection between conflict and confidentiality in the context of coalition representations:

> It's very complex. And it's very hard to explain to somebody else the complexity of it. And how people can go out on their own. I mean, we give them full license to go out on their own. If it's approved by the [coalition], they can say it's part of the [coalition]. But if it's their own position, then they need to say it's their own position, whether it is an organization or something other than the [coalition], or if it differs from the [coalition]. I don't want to limit anybody's opinions or free speech. I think that's what makes our organization strong -is that people *can differ* as long as they differ with their own name, rather than the [coalition]'s name.

This excerpt speaks to the complexities involved with negotiating internal conflict in a productive and functional manner while at the same time protecting individual advocacy in the public sphere and the coalition from erroneous external representations.

Recall that Ian discussed this issue in the mini-conflict training session described earlier. As he suggested during that session, the last thing that RWD would want to do is to grant Ken Gordon, UWD's general manager or any of his aqueduct allies, fodder to encourage ruptures or divisions within RWD. Recall, also, that the last line in the ethical guidelines reads: "(3 strikes you're out!!)." This, coupled with text from the section on

confidentiality, speaks to the critical need to contain conflict and ensure confidentiality as a key rhetorical strategy and best practice in process literacy toward coalition maintenance.

Thus, effectively containing conflict within RWD through confidentiality reminders and participant practices is a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance and a best practice in process literacy. Moreover, recurring appeals for confidentiality helps to create a sense of security for participants to share sensitive information with one another. However, some individuals tend to be conflict avoidant and need space and encouragement to speak their minds during conflict situations.

Keeping Communication Participatory across Communicative Genres

The third process literacy strategy facilitates participatory communication during conflict situations. Recall my definition of participatory communication from the introduction as a form of individual agency and engagement with others in pursuit of ideas, values, interests or goals. In an interview with Rita, she discusses what constrains and enables participation in RWD. Rita describes fatigue as something that constrains participation and a little bit of "anger" or "frustration" as something that can enable participation:

> Rita: I think being tired is probably the biggest contributor to anger or frustration. Because they are either tired of the topic or they're tired of listening to somebody talk. And so my sense is… one of the biggest problems we face is just going through the meeting.
> Deb: What energizes or revitalizes participation?
> Rita: Sometimes a little anger does inject a little wake up call to ah that somebody is not content with the ways things are going and that will often generate further discussion and wake people up. Um so, from that point of view, it serves as an alarm clock in a way. And the other thing it does is, um maybe bring a new perspective that people say, oh well we didn't think about that or consider that

> aspect and I think they get the anger and the frustration and they try to respond *not* in kind, but say, "Oh this really does matter to this person." And causes them to think a little deeper and a little harder about their own position, so, anyway, my sense is it's not a bad thing but sometimes it does make the meeting go on a little longer than it needs to [laughing].
> Deb: So, you don't have any problem with anger.
> Rita: No. Most of time it is a good thing.
> Deb: OK, so [are there] any other specific communication patterns that enables the group to work well together?
> Rita: Well, I think, frankly, the open discussion - I find very creative. I mean a lot of ideas come out, a lot of the creative ideas come out in the heat of discussion. And, if people can be concise rather than [sounds like 'blah blah blah'] it will move the discussion along much faster. And most people have learned to be concise because they realize that time is critical and that we only have a limited amount of time to pull off our agenda. And so I think people genuinely try to respect - respect everybody else when they make their comments and they try to be concise and on target as they can be. Some are better at it than others and sometimes you have to say, "Okay, now what do you really mean?" Ah, and people are saying, "Okay, let me back up and restate this, which is fine."

In response to my question about communication patterns that enable the group to work well, Rita focuses on the process of facilitating an "open discussion." She notes that this is a creative process and points to heated discussions as the time when the most creative ideas surface. Anger, therefore, is a sign that something matters and an opportunity within a collaborative communicative genre. And, when individuals are not able to articulate their interests clearly, they are invited to elaborate within an invitational rhetorical framework.

Other participant informants echoed their perspective that RWD practices participatory communication across rhetorical frameworks with an emphasis on pivoting discourse toward a deliberative rhetorical framework. In a phone interview with Ruby I asked, "Have you ever felt in conflict with other members of the coalition or their actions?" Ruby replied, "Yes, the two-state compact. We had all kinds of disagreements. Not just one but there were probably four different directions we all went." In response to

my next question: "How did that get dealt with?" Ruby said, "Quite well [laughter] ah, we had quite a number of discussions and everyone voiced their opinions and we kind of balanced it around […] whatever had the most backing and went with that" (DC10w, 12/14/11). Thus, Ruby, an indigenous woman, perceives the group to have handled the conflict well, because it was participatory ("everyone voiced their opinions"). When I probed for practices, patterns, and responses that help ease communication at RWD strategy meetings in my interview with Alex, he responded:

> I think in the meetings we've always let people have their say. And in a very specific example that I was referring to [the two-state compact], we actually spent a lot of time, um we actually spent a lot of time, allowing people to have their views felt and questions answered. I think that in meetings we are always allowing people to get their say. (DC8)

I will now turn to this highly participatory "open discussion" during a strategy meeting where conflict over the two-state compact was palpable and process literacy enabled participation across all three rhetorical frameworks (argumentative, invitational, and deliberative) and communicative genres (competitive and collaborative) depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

Engaging Differences through Dialogue

Recall that dialogue offers a model for engaging differences without consensus as a *telos.* By engaging differences, I refer to communicative processes that deal directly with divergent perspectives and opinions, or positions. I witnessed a group dialogue within the context of an RWD strategy meeting that lasted over an hour. This strategy meeting, immediately following the meeting in which the ethical guidelines were adopted included: listening, articulating, clarifying, interpreting, re-articulating, agreeing,

disagreeing, (in)venting, mediating, (re)framing, comparing, contrasting, evaluating, and persuading. Dialogue can happen across communicative genres, and process literacy helps to keep the communication productive and collaborative. I will now highlight how process literacy, helped the group to traverse rhetorical frameworks and draw from dialogue as a communicative bridge across primarily invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks within a collaborative communicative genre.

During this memorable meeting in Southern Desert State, a leader from one of the American Indian tribes updated the group on the status of the two-state compact. The tribe, he informed the group, opposes the signing of a two-state compact on strong legal ground. A few participants made supportive comments and thanked the tribal leader for his work. As a transition to the next item on the agenda that read, "Legal update," Rita reiterated the confidentiality rule, something that she had already underscored at the very beginning of this meeting (01/09/10). At this juncture, Ian briefed the group on a couple of RWD court rulings and the timing of an appeal relative to two upcoming administrative processes in which the RWD would be participating. He then indicated that UWD had recently attempted to discredit one of the judges by writing scandalous news about him. "It's an editorial game," he lamented. "Can someone monitor UWD to protect inappropriate material from being inserted into documents?" Then, Alonso, the small business owner who is emphatically opposed to a two-state compact, remarked that he was planning to meet with Mountain State officials and suggested that he could set the record straight on some of the inaccurate information. Rita interjected, "Don't waste time getting into a discussion about a pro/con two-state compact with them." And then, she called on Ian to continue his legal update. After this, Rita shifted the focus of the group to

the next topic: the environmental impact statement (EIS) public participation process for the proposed aqueduct.

Immediately after lunch that same day, Rita framed an open discussion around how to confidentially disseminate information in Mountain State and then she shifted the discussion to an invitational rhetorical framework by inviting participants in the circle (approximately 30 individuals inside a living room of a private home) to share their opinions about the two-state compact. Before opening up participation, she told the group that a consensus was not a viable goal since there were strong opinions and disagreements over the issue. This framing of the discussion tacitly conveyed that the *telos* would fall short of mutual agreement on an action plan.

In the dialogic session that followed lunch that day, there were no fewer than 66 turns taken over a period of about 1 1/2 to 2 hours averaging between 1 1/2 minutes to 2 minutes per speaker (01/09/10). During this time, individuals weighed in on their opinions about the controversial two-state compact. Aside from calling the names of the next speakers, Rita took 5 of the 66 turns. Not only did she facilitate a highly participatory communication process in the context of the two-state conflict, she helped the group to move between invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks as the rhetorical situation shifted in the room. For example, at one point, Rita stated, "This is your valley, not mine. Folks from the valley, what would work for you?" This is an example of facilitating to identify options for mutual gain within a deliberative rhetorical framework. About seventeen turns later, Ian facilitated a shift to an invitational rhetorical framework by explaining why those who are directly impacted by the two-state compact might value the compact more than others. This explanation is an example of

paraphrasing others' perspectives as a signal to the others that their issues and concerns have been heard and understood. Some 17 turns later, a participant from the valley in question asked, "So what if we all agree against the compact? What do we do?" This question raised a red flag for Rita as the facilitator, because it implied that the majority opinion in the room constituted a consensus.

At this juncture in the meeting Rita chose to straddle an invitational and deliberative rhetorical framework by reminding this participant that a viable mutual agreement was not feasible. While cooperative argumentation and sharing of perspectives in a deliberative fashion, including critical evaluation of opinions, ideas, and suggestions that were germane to the situation, mutual agreement was not the *telos*. Rita, replied, "We can't agree. There is too much diversity in the group, and the options may be foreclosed." By "foreclosed," Rita meant that Mountain State's governor might have already signed the two-state compact as word among the governor's staff indicated that a signature by him was imminent. Twenty-two turns later, Rita signaled to the group that it was time to wrap up the dialogue, "We need to recap and move on the agenda due to timing. Ruby gets a moment at the end." A proponent of the two-state compact spoke next within a cooperative argumentative framework. And Rita reiterated, "We need to recap this discussion. Can we discuss points to improve [our situation]?" Sarah, spoke next, "This has been a good discussion with important points made." Appu spoke with optimism, "We still have a chance to move forward without the compact." At this point, Rita cautioned, "We haven't imploded. There have been a variety of ideas." Then, she changed the discussion topic by asking David to complete the report on plans for the Mountain State's legislative session.

This scenario requires unpacking to better understand the importance of the process literacy strategy that keeps communication participatory while engaging conflict. As is typical in the RWD meetings, Rita called on participants as they indicated interest in speaking by raising their hands. She often states three or four names in sequence as a way to regulate turn taking and manage participant expectations with respect to timing. During this rhetorical situation, at least 21 out of about 26 participants chose to speak. The primary proponent for the two-state compact, Joe, took about 10 turns, Ian took approximately 8, Alonso took 3 (but walked in and out of the room toward the end of the discussion), and everyone else took anywhere from 1 to 5 turns. Participation from almost everyone in the room, during a controversial discussion, is exemplary of a participatory communicative process (Kaner, 2007).

Throughout this two-state open discussion participants traversed argumentative, deliberative and invitational rhetorical frameworks within a collaborative communicative genre. Rita kept the turns rolling and maintained a diversity of voices. In spite of strong oppositional opinions, there was never an attempt on her part to flatten or reframe the differences in the room. Put another way, the distinctions among all of the different perspectives, as articulated by each participant remained in relief. While the topic was highly controversial, participants offered up a wide range of diverse ideas and opinions, sometimes expressing positions within a cooperative argumentative rhetorical framework using logic and reason to persuade others. The process of turn-taking involved making sure that differences in opinions and concerns regarding issues were articulated with time for re-articulation, especially for Joe, who held the minority opinion in the room. This appeared effortless, but as Rita revealed to me later that day, “There were moments when

I wasn't sure we were going to make it through the meeting, but we did okay."

Toward the end, when Appu spoke with optimism and implied that the group was close to a consensus on the two-state compact, Rita cautioned everyone, "We haven't imploded," and quickly moved the discussion to a different topic. This is an example of a discursive move that backed away from the impulse to reach an agreement. Given the passionate speeches and sensitivity of the disclosures that took place during this substantive session, I would characterize much of the communication among participants as dialogic. Recall that dialogue theory offers a bridge between invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks. In dialogue, differences are engaged and deliberated, but reaching mutual agreements is not a *telos*. Knowing when to back off of this *telos* is a best practice of process literacy within a collaborative communicative genre.

The Back-Story

Without expert facilitation during such a sensitive juncture in the RWD's history, the meeting could have taken a dysfunctional turn. I know this because I rode for 5 hours in a car with Alonso on the way to this meeting and listened to him vent about the two-state compact controversy. He was "loaded for bear" on his way to that meeting. He told me that the RWD participants had been saying that they needed to agree to disagree and that he was opposed to this. "The RWD needs to take a position against the compact, but they won't!" He wanted my opinion on what to say in the RWD meeting. Drawing from my background in environmental mediation and my affinity with the RWD guidelines, I counseled him to be tough on the issues and to take it easy on the people. He said, "I may quote you." Alonso wanted RWD to take a stand against the two-state compact, but he

was certain that RWD would not take a position. I asked him to imagine the possibility of a different outcome and we bet five dollars on it. I still owe him that money.

The first words out of Rita's mouth, after introductions at that meeting, were that the group was not going to try to reach an agreement on the two-state compact (because, as she later explained to me, it was clear to her from discussions with participants in between the meetings) that a mutual agreement was not attainable. Alonso was correct in his assessment of the situation and he was still very angry when we entered the meeting space. He came in and out of the room that morning because he was working on an opinion editorial. Yet, when it was his turn to weigh in on the two-state issue, he spoke in a circumspect manner that was quite different from the tenor of his remarks when we were in the car. For example, in the car, he made remarks like, "This is war;" "People in rural [Mountain State] are too nice," and with respect to a certain political leader, "Let's cut him up into pieces!" On the other hand, in the meeting, he couched his remarks with provisional language such as, "Let me play devil's advocate." He asked questions that invited participation and critical perspective on the issue such as, "Why will [Mountain State] enforce the compact?" Alonso explained that from his perspective, the compact is merely a political trade on aqueducts; e.g., "We won't block your aqueduct if you don't block ours." Joe responded with his rationale for supporting the compact. He explained that the compact creates a floor; without it there would be no floor. Another rancher, Randy, jumped into the fray, "[Legal action in] supreme court is inevitable. Don't hand them [UWD] the ability to win. I don't trust their morals. Joe replied, "Do they have any?" Laughter filled the room and Randy retorted, "They don't care about the plain, simple truth – not from the beginning to the end. They want declaration – they want 50

percent of water that doesn't exist. Any taking is mining. Oppose it. Those gutless bunch of (inaudible) people!" More laughter filled the room and Joe added, "Real or paper water?" and Randy replied, "Don't matter."

I attribute the change in Alonso's tenor to at least three things: (1) his venting in the car helped him to release tensions and calm down (he actually told me on our drive home that this was the case), (2) individuals tend to moderate or temper their emotions in group settings (and yet Alonso is less apt to moderate himself than other participants within RWD), (3) the process literacy of RWD, and (4) Rita's facilitative capabilities. I will elaborate on the latter to spotlight the significance of facilitation as a capacity indicator of process literacy.

Process Literacy as a Discursive Lubricant across Communicative Genres

From the get-go in this meeting, Rita managed expectations regarding the most controversial topic on the agenda. When it came time to address the topic, in addition to repeated confidentiality appeals, Rita reminded the group that the purpose of the discussion was to hear from everyone about the situation, and that it was *not* to try to reach agreements. This discursive move draws from an invitational rhetorical framework. Rita was inviting individuals to share their perspectives, She was not requesting suasory remarks aimed at convincing others that they should reconsider their current position on the matter. Opening the discussion within an invitational rhetorical framework opened the communication climate. Everyone that wanted to speak got his or her say. Tacitly, this conveyed a message that deliberation is still valuable without a *telos* of consensus. In other words, ditching the impulse to reach agreements carved out a rhetorical space that

enabled the group to engage their discursive differences and cultural tensions. The ability to create and maintain this space or discursive opening during conflict situations is a sign of process literacy – a best practice in internal coalition communication.

Rita kept the turns rolling and occasionally made transitional remarks between speakers with regard to content, but only as a means to segue from one speaker to another. Individuals spoke with deep passion and auditors listened carefully. Few if any side remarks were made as participants took turns. One time when a side conversation did get started, Rita walked over to the area in the room and put her hands up to her mouth as if to shape a megaphone. The conversation stopped and the two participants chuckled at Rita's nonverbal reminder that listening was at the top of the cue. As Rita rotated throughout the room calling three to four participant names at a time, participants had time to collect their thoughts, to contribute ideas that built off of the ideas of others, to share unique concerns, to make suggestions and to advocate perspectives. In short, this session took on a dialogic quality. Communication was participatory and productive. It flowed, and diversity thrived.

Rita's brief remark at the end of this "open discussion" (as she calls it) offers a glimpse at her substantive expertise on Nevada water rights: "Prior appropriation is a fundamental component of Nevada water law. First in time has the first right and it is not reasonable to destroy this right," (DC7 11/09/11). It also provides an example of what Rita was searching for from the group when she asked: "Can we discuss points to improve [our situation]?" She explained this to me in our interview:

> If there are personal attacks or if it really has gone on too long and people are just [snoring sound] I just say, "Look, it's time to wind this up. Does anybody want to make a statement, a concise statement and I don't say it quite that way, but does anybody want to make a summary statement that they think might fit the group's

> need. And usually somebody will come up with something. We discuss it slightly longer and then it's over with. (11/09/11)

Her decision to make a summary statement regarding water rights came when she felt a need to shift agenda topics and to hold open a space for future open discussions about the two-state compact, as needed. In essence, her summary statement figuratively gathered up all of the discursive fragments in the room and cobbled them into a unified focus on the aqueduct proposal's threat to existing water rights represented in the room.

In short, process literacy opened up a space that enabled the group to air their differences and negotiate conflict while maintaining coalition unity. Recall, also from the scenario above, Ian's explication about how he could understand how those who may be more directly impacted by a two-state compact could hold opposing viewpoints from those who may be less directly impacted. Attorneys are formally trained to be able to argue issues from opposing perspectives. Ian's decision to take the time to be transparent and to meta-communicate about the differences in the room, demonstrates process literacy. He was able to work across communicative frameworks by honoring the diverse perspectives in the room (invitational), backing off of expectations to reach consensus as a *telos* (dialogic) while still inventing options for possible individual action and collective pathways forward (deliberative rhetoric within an integrative mediation/negotiation model).

Through perspective taking, Ian invoked an invitational rhetorical framework by helping others in the room to imagine what it would be like to view the situation from a different vantage point. Then, he shifted into an argumentative mode and proceeded to evaluate the pros and cons of a two-state compact from a legal perspective. Finally, he invented plausible options for legal recourse that could happen with and without a signed

two-state compact and suggested in so many words, “Either way, some of you may wish to go to court and some of you may choose not to be represented. That’s okay” (01/09/10). Tacitly, this conveys the message that we can all agree to disagree and still move forward against the proposed aqueduct, together, while having individual choices for future legal recourse. In other words, what could have been couched in a competitive or divisive legal framework by Ian, was instead couched in a collaborative and convergent manner within a deliberative rhetorical framework and ending with an invitational rhetorical framework - one in which participants could ponder and imagine disparate realities among themselves without it getting in the way of the important work at hand (Bone et al., 2008).

Summary

The capacity for process literacy in internal coalition communication is directly related to the skill sets of individuals that constitute it. Practices that are indicative of a high capacity for process literacy within coalition communication include: facilitation, mediation and discursive accommodation. These practices increase the capacity for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences that are inherent in internal coalition communication because they act as discursive lubricants to enable nuanced negotiation of shifting rhetorical frameworks driven by rhetorical situations. Moreover, the above examples demonstrate that developing ethical guidelines to keep the peace within a comic frame, containing conflict by attending to confidentiality, and maintaining participatory communication while engaging differences across rhetorical frameworks are three strategies for best practices in process literacy. Process literacy is developed

through formal training and real world experience. It is not by accident that Rita has become the primary facilitator for RWD, since she has both an academic and practical background in environmental planning, mediation and facilitation. She is aware of the communicative choices she makes as a facilitator and a mediator, which are informed by theory and practice. Ian's awareness of choices he makes to help reach diverse audiences through discursive accommodation and as a co-facilitator in support of the lead facilitator is also salient, here. While I have spotlighted these two individuals, in part because of their highly visible facilitative roles in the group and in part because of their willingness to meta-communicate about communicative process during the meetings and in interviews, I have also provided evidence that a good number of RWD participants have process literacy skills and apply them as they are negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences with an eye toward coalition maintenance. In sum, best practice in process literacy within internal coalition communication is constituted by the collective application of skill sets associated with the capacity indicators and rhetorical strategies that I have described above.

Implications and Conclusion

I have demonstrated that process literacy, or having an awareness of and the capacity to select communicative choices that keep communication productive during conflict situations, is a best practice in internal coalition maintenance. Process literacy strategies in RWD include: (1) ethical guidelines to keep the peace within a comic frame (e.g., "Refrain from personal attacks," and "Stick to the issues."); (2) confidentiality (e.g., "What happens [here] stays [here]!" and "Three-strikes you're out!"); as well as (3)

to keep communication participatory while working with conflict across rhetorical frameworks and applying appropriate conflict communication models (e.g., "We can agree to disagree.").

A melodramatic frame is incompatible with this type of internal coalition communication because melodrama accommodates personal attacks on individuals. A comic frame assumes those with opposing ideas and ideologies are worthy of respect, time, voice and a space in the middle of public life to grapple with differences in an effort to find and advance common interests. While the deliberative process carries with it a terministic screen that assumes an ideal *telos* as consensus, a deliberative rhetorical framework operating within a master comic frame can accommodate dialogue as a tool for grappling with incommensurate differences in the middle of public life. As Doxtader (2000) points out this is a space between a Habermasian public sphere (with an implied *telos* of communicative understanding) and critical social theory (with an implied *telos* of representation). Doxtader suggests that this middle of public life is fertile ground for wending our way out of the paradoxes associated with Habermas' philosophical and intersubjective theory of communicative action (e.g., achieving consensus by flattening differences between subjects) and critical sociological (including traditionally argumentative and rhetorical) approaches to communal governance (e.g., representational splitting of differences into perpetuity). I posit that process literacy, as practiced by RWD, offers insights for "wending our way out" of these paradoxes (Doxtader, 2000, p. 340).

I suggest that internal coalition communication within the RWD offers strategies for process literacy within other environmental campaigns, coalitions and organizations.

Moreover, studying how the RWD applies process literacy to come to (dis)agreements on particular action steps provides a case study with implications for how deliberative democracy can work within a multicultural context. However, the maturity levels and previous experiences of the participants in this particular coalition must be taken into account. The RWD is comprised of seasoned activists with long-standing relationships that date back to the nineteen eighties antinuclear campaign. Their history of working together to protect the land that they love (where many of them live, work and play) is an aspect of RWD's process literacy that cannot be ignored. The maturity-levels, relational histories and the collective wisdom among the participants in the RWD are attributes that lend themselves to best practices for negotiating difference, especially discursive differences and cultural tensions that constitute this coalition. Best practices of process literacy may be more difficult to enact in coalitions lacking these attributes. Moreover, coalitions are typically formed around single issues involving a common threat or enemy such as the water aqueduct proposal. However, there are models of coalitions that form and function to envision common futures rather than to fight common threats or enemies (e.g., Greater Baton Rouge Clean Cities Coalition and Envision Utah). Process literacy as a best practice in coalition maintenance may be key to identifying functional pathways forward for deliberative democracy in late modernity as we strive to create sustainable futures at a watershed level.

Using conflict theory to understand process literacy as a rhetorical strategy in internal coalition communication contributes to under-theorized rhetorical scholarship in the realm of deliberative communication. Scholars focused at the nexus of deliberative democracy, conflict studies, (including dialogue) political/deliberative/environmental

communication and rhetorical theory should be interested in these findings. Future research might explore process literacy within internal coalition communication contexts where participants have less relational histories or less activism experience and/or a younger or more diverse participant demographic. In sum, the findings in this case study point to several loci for future research in internal coalition communication. Moreover, given that water is what makes life possible on earth, I suggest that studies in internal coalition communication in the context of environmental water conflicts is critical and fertile ground for gaining insights into practical ways to foster participatory and deliberative participation in environmental democracy – one in which the inhabitants of a watershed, well beyond humans, have "voice."

Notes

[26] I capitalize the term "Western" to distinguish it from the more common geographic meaning of this word. In this context, a "Western perspective" references a broad and generalized cultural orientation that emerged after the industrial revolution, in industrialized countries of western Europe and North America. However, I am primarily referring to North American cultural orientations when I use this term in this context. Put another way, this term does not denote cultural orientations confined specifically to western states within the United States, nor does it reference cultural characteristics associated with the Middle East or Asia.

[27] These overlapping circles represent an oversimplification of the complex rhetorical dynamics of face-to-face, cross-cultural coalition communication. For example, I do not mean to create a false dyad between argumentation and deliberation, since deliberation is a form of argumentation aimed at reaching reasoned decisions. Rather, as I explain in more detail, I am distinguishing these circles (or rhetorical frameworks) by *telos* and by the communicative genre in which they are embedded.

[28] By "argumentative," I am not referring to an adjective that describes someone as angry and oppositional. Rather I am referring to a type of communicative process that uses logical reasoning, critical thinking and support/refutation of key claims to persuade audiences toward particular conclusions.

[29] Makau and Marty (2001) include critical thinking, dialogic skills, and cooperative argumentation as essential components of ethical deliberative communities.

[30] I combine negotiation and mediation together because the same four paradigms or approaches apply to both of these conflict models. However, in mediation, a third (sometimes called "neutral") party facilitates the negotiation process aimed at reaching mutually beneficial decisions among disputants.

[31] The RWD participants use all four of the negotiation/mediation models to negotiate their discursive differences and cultural tensions during and between their group encounters (although a performative paradigm is predominantly at work during social gatherings outside of the face-to-face meeting context (e.g., during meals and socials the night before the quarterly meetings and at community festivals)).

[32] This draws on the work of Foucault (2001).

[33] This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, rather, a beginning point for examining process literacy in the context of coalition maintenance strategies.

[34] A two-state compact that allocates the water rights for each state in Dry Wash Basin, a valley that straddles the Mountain State/Desert State border, is required in order for Desert State to draw water from underneath Dry Wash Basin for conveyance in the proposed aqueduct. This requirement is spelled out in a Congressional Act that was

sponsored by Congressman Patrick Quinnert and passed in Congress within the first decade of the new millennium by a Republican-controlled Congress.

[35] This is a pseudonym for the town where RWD usually holds its quarterly meetings.

[36] However, it could be argued that Alonso's open letter is criticism within a comic frame to prevent Joe from caving into opportunism.

[37] I am not privy to the content or who was involved in these rumors. Ian mentioned that rumors were circulating during his conflict containment presentation at the strategy meeting.

[38] I place the term "neutral" in quotes, because while it is impossible for a mediator or facilitator to be neutral on all substantive, relational and processual aspects of group interactions, taking on a third party or neutral role requires maintaining an ethical distance from substantive aspects of deliberation and decision-making. The third party cannot be vested in a particular outcome and it certainly calls for transparency if conflicts of interest prevent the third party from functioning as a fair third party or in a so-called neutral role (Schuman, 2005).

[39] This also relates to cultural accommodation theory and cultural identity theory, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter (Hecht, Jackson & Pitts, 2005).

[40] Due to the sensitivities of the topic at hand, and since this was the first quarterly meeting that I had ever attended, I reluctantly refrained from taking many field notes. Unfortunately, my multiple requests for the content of the wall notes were never fruitful, in spite of David's (my gatekeeper), Rita's and Ian's expressed willingness to share them with me. Ted is the keeper of these notes. The fact that I was never able to procure them from Ted, speaks to some of the challenges associated with ethnographic field methods. While I am empathetic to RWD's cause, I have refrained from "going native" (Geertz, 1973). This creates some distance between RWD participants and me, and the distance varies by individual.

[41] The first change reflects a desire for some flexibility among participants since the term "guidelines" implies that minor variances might be acceptable in certain situations, whereas the term "code" does not. The second change is a step away from the more Draconian term "penalties" toward a more dynamic and less hierarchical term "responses." Both changes reflect RWD's relatively flattened hierarchy and a resistance to top down forms of power.

[42] Through member checks, I learned that someone had betrayed the group before I entered the scene that was posing as a graduate student but secretly spying on the group as an employee of UWD. One member wrote this "was a specific, concrete experience of

betrayal that led to an especially heightened sense of wariness toward unknown outsiders claiming to be sympathetic and wanting to participate in our discussions."

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this manuscript, I have explored rhetorical strategies of internal coalition communication in the context of a major water dispute in the U.S. West. Three and a half years of qualitative fieldwork has offered me a window into understanding internal coalition communication in support of coalition maintenance. More specifically, I discovered how a comic frame is the master frame within which RWD uses rhetorical strategies for negotiating discursive difference and cultural tensions as participants deliberate strategies to defeat the proposed aqueduct. Within this master frame, I focused on two rhetorical strategies that RWD participants use to maintain productive and collaborative communication: humor and process literacy. First, I will review my findings and key claims along with the contributions they make to literature. Then, I will offer a reflection on some of the dilemmas I have encountered in doing cross-subdisciplinary research. I will end by discussing implications and additional suggestions for future research.

Review of Findings

Humor as Rhetorical Strategy in Coalition Maintenance

I have shown in Chapter 4 that humor is a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance because it supports the willingness to participate and to continue engaging in coalition work. This entails arduous efforts to effect change within complex socio-economic and political systems. In short, the practice of using appropriate humor in *kairotic* moments in internal coalition communication is a best practice in internal coalition maintenance.

I identified four types of humor that help to enable internal coalition communication in the context of face-to-face RWD meetings. These forms of humor are: 1) lighthearted humor, which releases tensions and frees up energy to sustain long work sessions; 2) self deprecating humor, which is a sign of an open communication climate with fewer egoistic impediments; 3) satire and irony, which function to critique the stupidity of problems within complex social systems; and 4) humor at the expense of others, which is humor that laughs at (not with) others.

I found that while the first three forms of humor function within the master comic frame that guides the group, the last form of humor gets operationalized within both a comic and a melodramatic frame. Within a comic frame, humor at the expense of others is a mild form of teasing where relationships are strong enough to withstand the rhetorical blow. Within a melodramatic frame, on the other hand, it denigrates targets external to the coalition that signify moral corruption, e.g., greed. These findings suggest that comic and melodramatic frames can coexist in internal coalition communication when used appropriately in *kairotic* moments. In other words, at opportune moments, I observed a

shift from comic to melodramatic frame. This is important because diverse participants constitute coalitions in loosely structured issue-based associations that require sensitive communication in order to sustain collective efforts toward common goals. Rhetorical strategies that help the group cohere are vital to coalition maintenance, and my findings suggest that instances of melodramatic humor can help to support internal coalition maintenance in certain situations. Co-constructing rhetorical devils external to a coalition through humor at the expense of others and delivered within a melodramatic frame can foster cohesion and relational solidarity among coalition participants. It is important to note that melodramatic humor in internal coalition communication is not without risks: 1) if targeted internally toward coalition participants it would constrain communication as a divisive rather than as a unifying form of humor; and 2) if secondary accounts of melodramatic humor were to leak beyond trusted coalition participants, it could cast a negative light on the coalition in the eyes of others and potentially undermine the coalition's credibility. Yet, my observation of RWD suggests that in groups where a history of mutual trust exists, melodramatic humor used infrequently and appropriately can serve coalition maintenance.

I have also suggested that there may be a relationship between self-deprecating forms of humor and collaborative learning within cross-cultural and environmental contexts. I posit this because as a precursor to conflict talk, self-deprecating humor demonstrates a willingness to set the ego aside and diffuse the fear of aggressive conflict talk. Absent fear, which constrains communication, participants may be more open to hearing and learning about perspectives that do not necessarily resonate with their respective worldviews. My findings suggest that exploring the role of egos and

communication climates in deliberative communities may be fruitful for gleaning more understanding about how, if at all, self-deprecating forms of humor are related to collaborative learning.

These findings on the forms and functions of humor as a rhetorical strategy in internal coalition maintenance should be of interest to scholars of social movements, rhetorical theory, conflict studies, participatory communication – including small-, inter-group and (inter)organizational communication, and democratic community engagement/capacity building.

Social movement scholars are interested in the ways that individuals and publics are motivated or moved to affect change. Since coalitions are formed to influence and move publics, they are part and parcel to social movement. Thus, understanding coalition maintenance is part of understanding what contributes to the maintenance of social movement. More specifically, understanding how both comic and melodramatic humor support coalition maintenance contributes to social movement literature that focuses on internal audiences. More specifically, I have identified melodramatic humor as a strategy for internal audiences, or what Gregg (1971) calls the ego-function of protest rhetoric, because it can encourage a sense of belonging and unity among RWD coalition participants.

The rhetorical framing of messages is of paramount interest to rhetorical theorists. Much has been written about Burke's comic frame, but not in the context of internal coalition communication and maintenance. Moreover, the shifts between melodramatic and comic humor that I describe in Chapter 4, contribute to conversations about the

interplay between melodramatic and comic frames in rhetorical theory, particularly at the intersection with environmental communication literature.

Organizational communication scholars may be interested in the way that humor helps a diverse group of individuals to negotiate cultural tensions and discursive differences in the context of a highly participatory collective and within a relatively flattened hierarchy. Most of the research on humor in this subdiscipline either treats humor from the standpoint of gender or that, which unites and divides groups. I have fleshed out various forms of humor and interpreted how they help to support coalition maintenance. These findings can serve as a heuristic for future research within other organized multicultural collectives from micro- to meso- contexts (e.g., from small group to (inter)organizational and at community engagement levels).

My findings on humor in support of coalition maintenance also have application in the peace and conflict studies literature. First, little is written about humor in this interdisciplinary field of study, especially within relevant communication literature. Second, the findings with regard to self-deprecating forms of humor connect with literature that treats distancing subject (or identity) from object (content) in conflict situations. I will return to this below when I discuss identity vulnerability.

Process Literacy as Rhetorical Strategy in Coalition Maintenance

In Chapter 5, I demonstrated that process literacy is another best practice in coalition maintenance, because it acts like a discursive lubricant that keeps internal coalition communication productive across shifting rhetorical situations affected by external exigencies and group interactions. It does this by primarily pivoting interactions

toward a collaborative communicative genre and a deliberative rhetorical framework, although it also entails the wisdom to know when to shift away from the goal of mutual decisions toward more invitational or cooperative argumentative rhetorical frameworks.

Three characteristics of (or capacity indicators for) process literacy that I have identified and described are: facilitation, mediation, and discursive accommodation. Facilitation and mediation are communicative interventions that employ similar skill sets to help groups or disputants grapple with conflicts in a way that enables productive communication toward mutual goals. Skilled intervention, in the form of co-facilitation, is fundamental to bringing out the process literacy of a group or coalition. It is a form of shared leadership that sustains and builds capacity for process literacy. Mediation, as a dispute resolution process, is a key capacity indicator of process literacy, because it aims to resolve conflicts between participants in between group sessions or strategic deliberations. While in a process literate coalition such as the RWD, participants are often capable of mediating their own disputes, it is also beneficial to have individuals with some formal mediation/conflict resolution training because these individuals might recognize when a third party intervention is warranted to help shift communicative interactions toward more productive and collaborative ways for dealing with conflict. Discursive accommodation is a third characteristic or capacity indicator of process literacy. This involves having an awareness of disparate audiences' unique cultural orientations or practices and making accommodations that respect them. This enables a rhetor to build rapport across cultural divides by avoiding certain signifiers or speech acts that might be perceived by audience members as culturally offensive. Discursive accommodation practiced as a form of critical self-awareness enables coalition

maintenance and supports coalition development, because it attends to the cultural preferences of disparate participant associates and potential associates.

In addition to these three capacity indicators, I identified and described three rhetorical strategies as best practices in process literacy: creating ethical guidelines (or the collaborative development of ground rules for group interactions); containing conflict within the group and attending to the need for confidentiality; and keeping communication participatory across rhetorical frameworks and relevant communicative genres. Creating ethical guidelines (interactive ground rules) is a strategy for maintaining unity before conflicts erupt. In conflict situations, a recurring appeal for confidentiality is also vital to coalition maintenance because it contains the conflict and prevents further splintering that could be encouraged by outside and unfriendly interests. Moreover, absent breaches in confidentiality over time, mutual trust among disparate actors can increase, which fosters the mutual sharing of information. A third best practice of process literacy, keeping communication participatory during coalition conflict communication, includes knowing when to back off of the desire to reach mutual agreements and support dialogic approaches to conflicts over strategies.

Process literacy in internal coalition communication is directly related to the skill sets of individuals that constitute it. Process literacy can be developed through real world experiences and formal training. In part, it involves willingness to track and meta-communicate about relational, processual, and substantive issues in addition to the collective application of skill sets associated with keeping communication productive and within a collaborative genre during conflict situations. These findings with regard to process literacy as a crucial aspect of coalition maintenance are not intended to be

exhaustive. They have emerged from research among middle aged and senior coalition participants with relational histories.[43] Future case studies might involve environmental coalitions with more age diversity and less relational histories.

My findings on process literacy contribute to scholarly conversations about cross-cultural conflict, particularly within the communication discipline and at the confluence of conflict resolution, rhetorical theory, and participatory/deliberative democracy. The process literacy schema that I presented in Chapter 5 and in Figures 1 and 2 puts conflict resolution models in conversation with shifting rhetorical frameworks. The bodies of literature that treat conflict resolution theory do not explicitly import much in the way of rhetorical theory. Rather, they emphasize paradigms (e.g., distributive, integrative, transformative or performative) and processual or practical methods for resolving conflict. Likewise, rhetorical theory does not emphasize communicative models for resolving conflicts. Traditionally, rhetorical theory has focused on persuasion and argumentation within a predominantly competitive communicative genre, with the exception of invitational rhetoric and to a degree, deliberative rhetoric. For example, Doxtader (2000) theorized a space in the middle of public life between dissensus and consensus and called for exploration of the rhetorical dynamics associated with this space. This study offers process literacy in response to that call.

To review, I mapped overlapping rhetorical frameworks and situated Doxtader's space in the middle of public life in the overlapping areas between them. I also identified conflict resolution models that were relevant to negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences in RWD's internal coalition communication and then mapped them within collaboratively oriented rhetorical frameworks: invitational and deliberative. I then

demonstrated the way process literacy functions to pivot conflict communication away from a competitive genre and an argumentative rhetorical framework toward a collaborative genre, as well as ultimately toward a deliberative rhetorical framework in support of coalition maintenance. Best practices in process literacy draw from the conflict models that I treat in this research. And by putting conflict theory in conversation with rhetorical theory, the research makes contributions to both.

The findings with regard to process literacy also contribute to conversations among scholars interested in negotiating differences within the context of participatory and deliberative democracy (from dissensus to consensus). Deliberative democracy scholars grapple with dilemmas associated with the ideals of democracy in a post-modern condition. There are problems with scale, pluralism and access. Public participation scholarship, particularly within environmental communication literature are concerned with the participation gap and ways to facilitate collaborative learning (e.g., Walker, Senecah & Daniels, 2006). I argue that looking at how discursive differences and cultural tensions in coalition deliberation are negotiated, is one way to get at some of these issues, because I assume that the ideals of democracy and participation are vital to coalition maintenance. I suggest this because in cross cultural coalition deliberation the conditions of moral respect, egalitarian reciprocity and open communication get put to the test. Conceiving of RWD as a cross-section of the *demos*, I assert that the rhetorical tactics and strategies that enable or constrain RWD maintenance can contribute to theory about creating the conditions for a more participatory and deliberative democracy. My findings illuminate best practices for negotiating cultural tensions and discursive differences in a highly participatory and relatively flattened hierarchy. This, I suggest contributes to

scholarship aimed at the paradoxes associated with democratic ideals in multiple contexts.

Research Dilemmas

Moving beyond my specific research findings, claims and contributions, I want to focus on some of the costs and benefits associated with cross-subdisciplinary research. By cross-subdisciplinary research, I mean research that draws primarily from and contributes to multiple communication subdisciplines such as contemporary rhetorical theory, environmental, conflict, participatory and organizational communication. Perz et al. (2010) discuss crossing boundaries in interdisciplinary, interorganizational and global collaboration as being paramount to environmental conservation. I believe that the field of communication has much to offer with respect to environmental problems that we face in late modernity, and I remain convinced that crossing (sub)disciplines is essential to finding solutions expeditiously. However, just as there are benefits to this approach, there are also drawbacks.

For example, one benefit of using conflict theory to understand process literacy as a rhetorical strategy in internal coalition communication is that it contributes to under-theorized rhetorical scholarship in the realm of deliberative communication. But paradoxes exist. Burke (1989) expounds on the dilemmas associated with terministic screens by reasoning that any definition of humans from within a specific discipline, such as the social sciences, would be "over-socialized" or "over-psychologized" for example, and yet to try to compensate for these "excesses" by cobbling together an eclectic philosophy across disciplines might produce an over-generalized result (p.122). I did not

set out to create a definition of humans, but I did work to characterize and theorize the communication that I have witnessed as a participant observer in the RWD meetings. I was not able to accomplish this task without drawing from theory across subdisciplinary fields. Doing this risked shifting the text away from specificities toward generalities. As such, developing theory to more fully account for the communication that takes place within coalitions, in part, is a paradoxical endeavor. To counter a pull toward over-generalizing, I paid close attention to continuities and discontinuities across concepts, terminology and theories as I drew from knowledge developed within and beyond communication subdisciplines; i.e., conflict studies (including mediation, dialogue and negotiation theory), participatory communication (especially democratic theory and models of communication) and contemporary rhetorical theory (primarily literature relevant to comic, argumentative, invitational and deliberative rhetorical frameworks). In short, engaging these disparate theoretical perspectives challenged me in ways that were both detrimental and beneficial to the overall project.

Implications

I began this project with two lines of argument: (1) we need to study specific rhetorical tactics and strategies in coalition maintenance; and (2) environmental coalitions require our attention because of the need to develop sustainable environmental (particularly water) policies. Throughout my analyses I have primarily focused my attention on the first line of argument.

I want to return to the second line of argument with regard to three broader implications from this research: (1) water as a site of resistance is a significant and

promising research locus for identifying pathways toward sustainable water policies and practices; (2) external environmental coalition rhetoric is a practical node for future exploration of the interplay between comic and melodramatic frames; and (3) responding to Doxtader's call for understanding the rhetorical dynamics of dissensus and consensus within a comic frame extends Burke's notion of identity vulnerability and the comic frame as a means for the broadening and maturing sectarian thought. I will discuss these implications next and devote more attention to the third implication because of the complexity of it.

First, coalitions that organize around resistance to water development projects are likely to continue to emerge with diverse actors in the coming decades. Given the intersections with climate change, extreme weather and water, I think these coalitions will be research sites ripe with opportunity for scholarship spanning interests in social movement, conflict transformation, deliberation, collaborative learning and multicultural democracy. Only recently have scientists begun to understand the effects of groundwater depletion for agriculture, industry, and urban growth. For example, Raloff (2012) reports, "most major assessments of factors affecting sea-level rise – such as those reported by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – ignored the role of groundwater extraction" (p. 1). Raloff explains that recent studies by Wada conclude that 34 % of sea-level rise has been attributed to groundwater removal practices. It is often assumed that ground water is a renewable resource, but there are problems relating to *chronemics* when groundwater removal occurs in biological time where it took geologic time for particular aquifers to develop. In other words, rhetorical criticism that focuses on the topic of water and water policy is crucial. I bring this to the fore in the context of serious problems

regarding climate change. Just as Carvalho and Peterson (2013) suggest that we need to understand the politics of climate change, we also need to focus on social movement and water. While internal coalition communication is a challenging research locus due to sensitivities regarding confidentiality concerns, external coalition communication with (counter)publics and institutional voices is a more visible (see also Schutten, 2007) and accessible site for researchers. In short, I am suggesting that external coalition communication - especially where water is a site of resistance - is a more accessible and equally important lens for developing knowledge about sustainable (water) practices.

Second, I have responded to Schwarze's (2006) call to explore the interplay between comic and melodramatic frames in the context of internal coalition communication. In this context, the comic frame is a master frame, but in particular moments as I have explained, comic and melodramatic humor can co-exist. I ask, might there also be certain *kairotic* moments in external environmental coalition communication when comic and melodramatic frames can coexist? For example, might certain coalition participants adopt melodramatic frames, representing themselves as citizen activists – and not as coalition representatives - to heighten public awareness in support of the coalitional cause? Simultaneously, might a process literate coalition - as an organized collective - approach policy makers suggesting ways to create legitimate deliberative spaces in which the participation gap can be narrowed and the decision spaces expanded at watershed and perhaps regional levels? In other words, more research is necessary to improve understandings about the interplay between internal and external coalition communication as well as between rhetoric within comic and melodramatic frames across these contexts.

Given the high capacity of process literacy and broad knowledge base of actors within RWD, this coalition holds the potential to influence water policies toward increased sustainability across these arid landscapes in the rural and urban U.S. West. Nevertheless, the knowledge gained from studying this mature group of activists carries with it wisdom that might well be applied in the middle of public life as well as in other institutionalized and organizational deliberative bodies. In other words, RWD's failures and accomplishments may serve as a model for finding peaceful pathways toward sustainable human communities embedded within healthy watersheds.

Third, I want to connect my findings in response to Doxtader's call for exploring the rhetorical dynamics between dissensus and consensus with Burke's notion of identity vulnerability and the maturing of sectarian thought within a comic frame. This implication is more complex than the other two implications, so I will begin with a musical metaphor, followed by a discussion about the comic corrective, and end with identity vulnerability and the broadening of sectarian thought.

Internal coalition communication in RWD is analogous to a highly diverse choir. Within it, there are a myriad of voices singing in disparate languages (or cultural speech codes). Each vocalist contributes a unique sound, e.g., pitch, rhythm, tonal quality, tempo, and volume. The music created by this collective is emergent – sometimes the sound is harmonious and at other times it is dissonant. Everyone participates as the choral group gathers to sing together on a regular basis. Through practice, individual voices strengthen and the collective sound improves. The vocalists strive for moments when the voices blend and sound as one. The tonal quality that comes in these magical moments resonates as an experience that feeds the desire to continue the process of singing

together. Songs from different musical genres get performed simultaneously. Medleys emerge in a round and certain refrains become prominent. On rare occasions the group performs for external audiences, but the primary purpose of gathering together is to try out new songs and creative ways for singing both individually and collectively.

I use this metaphor to explain how RWD participants routinely enter a space in the middle of public life and participate in meaningful, creative, and challenging work that recognizes the value of collaboration (e.g., singing in the same key). Dissonance (dissensus) and harmony (consensus) ebb and flow in internal coalition communication. It is always desirable when the chords (deliberation) resolve at the end of practice, but forcing it to do so would dampen the desire to participate. The choral metaphor is another way to think about Doxtader's call for exploring the rhetorical dynamics between dissensus and consensus. I have offered the concept of process literacy, as that which metaphorically pivots dissonance toward harmony within a comic frame. It functions as a comic corrective.

My reading of Burke's (1959) comic corrective is that it seeks to affect change by mitigating the internal conflicts that arise when individuals experience identity vulnerability (or destabilization). As Burke points out, our attitude toward something like capitalism becomes intertwined with social experiences. That is, the funding or currency of social gatherings, family meals, vacations and daily activities, including transportation to and from various geographic locations is created through capitalistic endeavors. An auditor, whose life world is embedded within a capitalist economy as Burke explains, will receive an anti-capitalistic rhetoric with some trepidation or dissonance, because the message to some degree threatens fond personal memories (e.g., the enjoyment of

strolling on a beach on a warm sunny afternoon is made possible through the currency of time and money within a capitalistic system). Insomuch as environmental rhetoric threatens capitalism, these problems of conflation and complicity arise. A comic frame recognizes these problems and adopts a broad view that social exigencies require scrutiny and critique. In this way, it accepts the pollution of pure ideas or ideals that inevitably occur through implementation of them. Burke (1959) describes this as the "bureaucratization of the imaginative possibilities" (p. 101).

Here, the old adage "the devil is in the details" comes to mind. This is because attempts to implement change within a frame of orthodoxy, as Burke points out, automatically invites an extension into heterodoxy. How far can individuals and collectives push for change within a complex system without calling into question far more than that which was originally being scrutinized? The interconnections are endless. What seems like an excellent idea turns out to be a messy idea in the implementation process within complex systems. Paradoxes arise (Stohl & Cheney, 2001). Within a comic frame, the motive to affect change can entail pushing and straining the boundaries of a given system, but the motive to affect change from *within* the system, remains. Activism within a comic frame seeks to generate a critical mass of social and material exigencies that support significant change within a complex system. Within a comic frame, those who seek radical changes in the system operate in the realm of heterodoxy without resorting to physical and verbal forms of violence.

Returning to the idea of identity vulnerability within a comic corrective, Tolle (2005) discusses the content and structure of the ego and its attachment with things. He states "we cannot really honor things if we use them as a means to self-enhancement …

Ego-identification creates attachment … obsession with things … where the only measure of progress is always *more*" (*italics in original,* p. 26). This suggests that there is a connection between ego and the ability to honor others. Perhaps, then, in the same way that self-deprecating humor is a rhetorical strategy in coalition maintenance, ego-awareness and -management (e.g., keeping one's ego in check) may be a rhetorical strategy for broadening sectarian thought and honoring others (including extra human life forms on earth).

Burke (1959) explains that questioning one aspect of something often gets interpreted as questioning a whole lot more. Environmental discourses intersect with discourses of daily living in ways that require privileging collective social and material interests over individual necessities and conveniences or comforts. Perhaps, then, the more radical forms of environmentalism embedded within capitalist systems make vulnerable the majority of individual identities through, for example, the conflation of capitalism with fond memories of everyday life. Terms like "gas hog" and "high carbon footprint" create dissonance for even the most ecologically minded individuals that require combustive engines for daily transportation in carbon-powered economies. Fond memories of traditional vacations may forsake the idea of an ecologically beneficial staycation (i.e., remaining close to home for a vacation) – a departure from the ideals associated with reducing one's carbon footprint. A certain degree of rationalization and compartmentalization is required to stabilize ecologically-minded identities within the constraints of daily and traditional travel routines in the industrialized world. Burke (1959) explains, "Often, the defense against this [sort of identity vulnerability] is 'dissociation,' which in time leads to 'atomism,' 'splintering'" (p. 103).

The degree to which a particular discourse resonates varies across social sectors or "function systems" (Peterson, Peterson, & Grant, 2004, p. 27). Dominant (or hegemonic) discourses connote relatively stable meanings across social sectors. For example, within a dominant industrial discourse, the exchange of time and labor for money in both public and private domains connotes work. When financial remuneration is not part of the exchange, it does not count as "real" work. Hegemonic discourses produce counter-hegemonic discourses. Some of the more radical discourses may not intersect with either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses because of fundamental disconnects at ontological, epistemological or axiological levels. For example, a collective interested in practicing a low carbon footprint might organize and break away, creating a sect that chooses to live off the power grid, grow their own food and use only renewable-power for forms of energy and transportation. This sect might then claim that living off of the carbon-based power grid is the only *pure* way to embody principles of sustainability.[44] Any deviation from these practices might then tarnish the whole character of the deviant. Burke (1959) reminds us that totalizing one's character, based on a simple deviation from orthodoxy, "figures largely in children (hence [it] applies to adults insofar as they are merely children-plus)" (p.103). Deviants face identity vulnerability and the splintering pattern continues.

Through the process of implementing the ideals that particular sectarians identify with, melodramatic rhetoric gets utilized (e.g., you're either with us or against us) and further atomization occurs until the fracturing goes so far that (re)unification becomes the only option for collective action. However, Burke suggests, "The solution [unification] is not wholly a happy one…In breaking down the clear lines of demarcation by which his

[sic] character has been formed, the dispossessed sectarian is in danger of losing his character" (p.101). In literary frames other than the comic frame, sectarian reunification means compromise – having to give up something to get something else - or selling out one's principles in order to live within a broader and more diverse collective. For Burke, the comic corrective, or a maturing of sectarian thought, is an alternative way to negotiate differences, to mitigate the perceived need to compromise one's principles and to maintain a healthy or productive tension between individual /collective identities.

Burke (1959) asserts that through the adoption of a wider comic frame, the endless cycle of atomization and discontented reunification of principled differences can "be met *actively, positively*. The comic frame relieves the pressure towards opportunism [or selling out] by a broadening or maturing, of sectarian thought" (pp. 102, 306). I suggest that humor and process literacy as rhetorical strategies for negotiating discursive difference and cultural tensions toward coalition maintenance within a master comic frame may also offer us insights toward a more participatory and environmental democracy. I suggest this knowing that ecological crises may render these and others' efforts toward such a democratic vision irrelevant. Nevertheless, given the speed of change due to technological advancements and climate change effects, I hope that the findings in this case study can make pragmatic contributions to the socio-ecological development of the human condition in late modernity.

Notes

[43] Some of the RWD participants worked as activists in an antinuclear campaign in the 1980's.

[44]This is a strategy for maintaining an "integrative identification" with mainstream ways of living in a more sustainable manner (Burke, 1959, p.103). The sect claims that it solely embodies the orthodox principles of the value system. This, for example, is often the case with churches that identify as a reformed version of a particular faith.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Opening

This section of each interview included exchanges about confidentiality, permission to record, signing of consent forms, expressed appreciation for the time and willingness to allow me to interview, and friendly conversation to help put the informant at ease. Since these are semistructured interviews I drew from the relevant questions tailored to each interviewee.

Background

1. Tell me about your history with the RWD. 1.b. How long have you been associated with or participating in the RWD?

2. How did you become aware of the [coalition]? 2b. What made you decide to get involved? 2c. Are you being paid for your services, or do you volunteer your time, or both?

Exploring Participation and Engagement

3. What does participation in the RWD mean to you? 3b. What does this entail?

4. In your opinion, what motivates you and others to continue participating?

5. Have there been times when you have intentionally changed your participation level in RWD activities? 5b. What factors contributed to this increase or decrease in participation?

6. From your perspective, how has your participation in the RWD changed over time? Please explain. 6b. How has participation by others ebbed or flowed over time? 6c. Has this coincided with any events, activities, disagreements, or decisions made by RWD?

Exploring Conflict Situations in Internal Coalition Communication

7. Have you ever felt conflicted with or at cross-purposes to the coalition goals? 7b. If so, will you please explain?

8. Have you ever felt in conflict with other members of the coalition or their actions? 8b. If so, how have you dealt with these feelings or situations, if at all? 8c. How have others dealt with these situations?

9. Beyond your situation, are there particular tensions that arise or persist within the core group of RWDers? 9b. From a communication perspective, what aggravates these tensions? 9c. Can you think of any communication practices, patterns or responses that help ease these tensions within the coalition?

Exploring Decision-Making in Internal Coalition Communication

10. How do major decisions get made in the RWD?

11. What happens when participants disagree?

12. Can you recall a time when disagreements affected your participation or other's participation in a meeting or in subsequent RWD meetings or activities? 12b. How was your participation affected? 12c. Others? 12d. Will you please share any thoughts you

might have about the handling of this situation by you and others? 12e. To your knowledge, are there any ill feelings being harbored by you or others over this disagreement?

13. Thinking about communication among [participants], are there specific events, actions practices, behaviors, relationships or communication patterns, which constrain the ability for the group to work well together?

14. Thinking, again, about communication among [participants], are there specific events, actions, practices, relationships or behavior patterns, which enable the group to work well together?

15. What, in your opinion, does the RWD need to do better or to communicate, if anything, in order to keep participants engaged with the [coalition]?

Exploring Communication with External Audiences

16. How would you describe the RWD's overall mission?

17. What would you say have been the biggest challenges for the RWD to communicate this mission?

18. What does developing the RWD mean to you? Does the RWD need developing?

19. How would you describe the vitality or durability of the RWD over time?

20. How big is the RWD and how have the numbers of participants ebbed or flowed over time? 19b. Are numbers of participants a factor in developing the [coalition]? What are the main factors that constrain or enable RWD development?

21. How well, in your opinion, has the RWD been able to get its message out to different publics? 21b. What specific messages or slogans, in your opinion, have worked well for reaching different publics? 21c. Why do you think these have worked?

22. Are there particular contexts, communication media, voices, relationships, etc. that constrain or hinder communicating with publics outside of the [coalition]?

Exploring Communication with Institutional Voices

23. How well, in your opinion, has the RWD been able to influence water policy or environmental decision-making processes related to water? 23b. What communication strategies or tactics have worked best to reach decision-makers? 23c. Why do you think these have been the most influential?

24. If you had anything you could change about communication outreach for the RWD, what would it be? Will you please elaborate a bit about that?

Closing

25. Is there anything that you would like to tell me or ask me?

26. What is the best method to contact you if I have any further questions for you?

27. Thank you very much for your valuable time. Here is my contact information if you would like to follow-up with me about anything.

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